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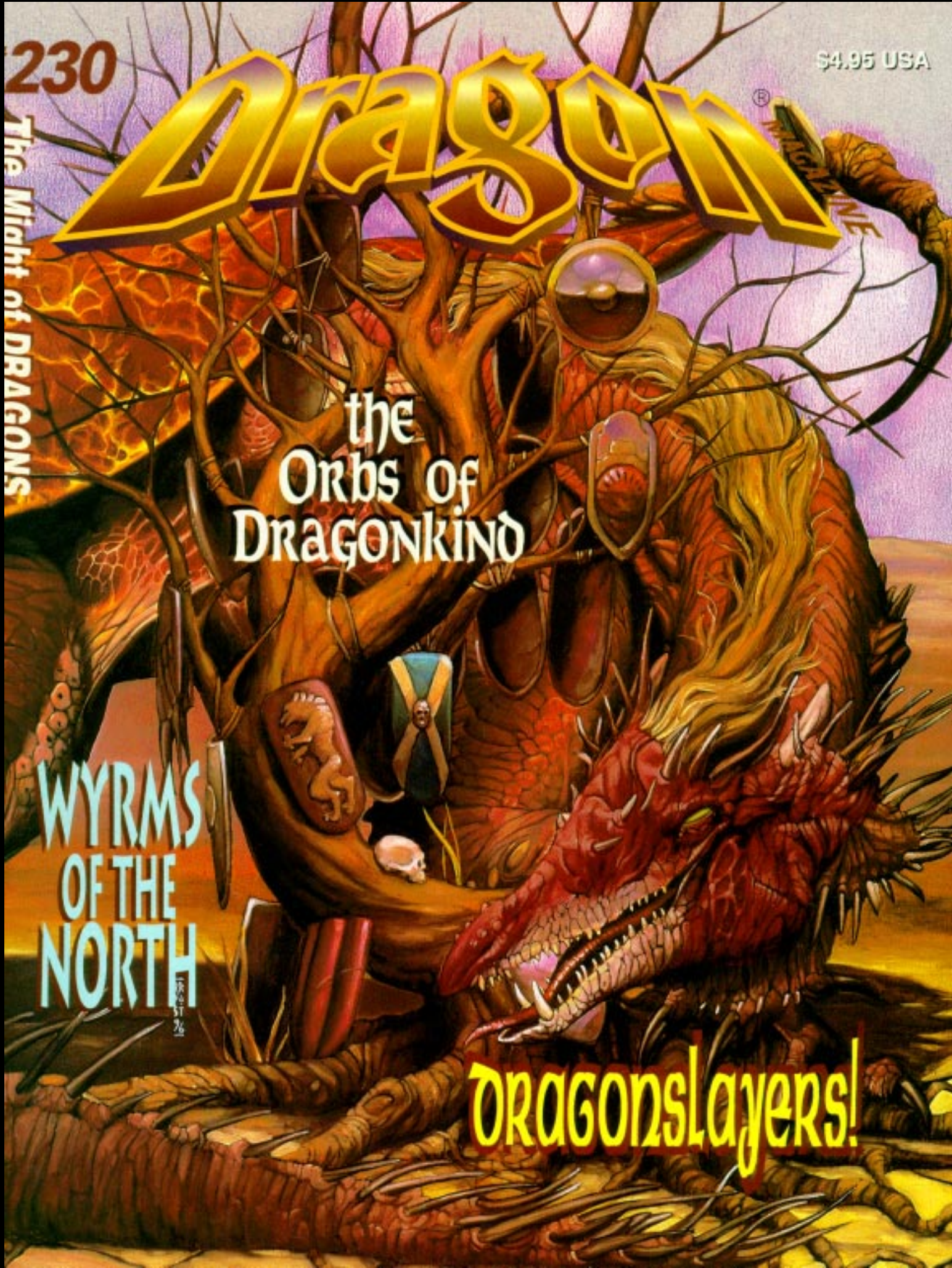
The Might of DRAGONS

Dragon[®] MAGAZINE

the
Orbs of
Dragonkind

WYRMS
OF THE
NORTH

dragonslayers!



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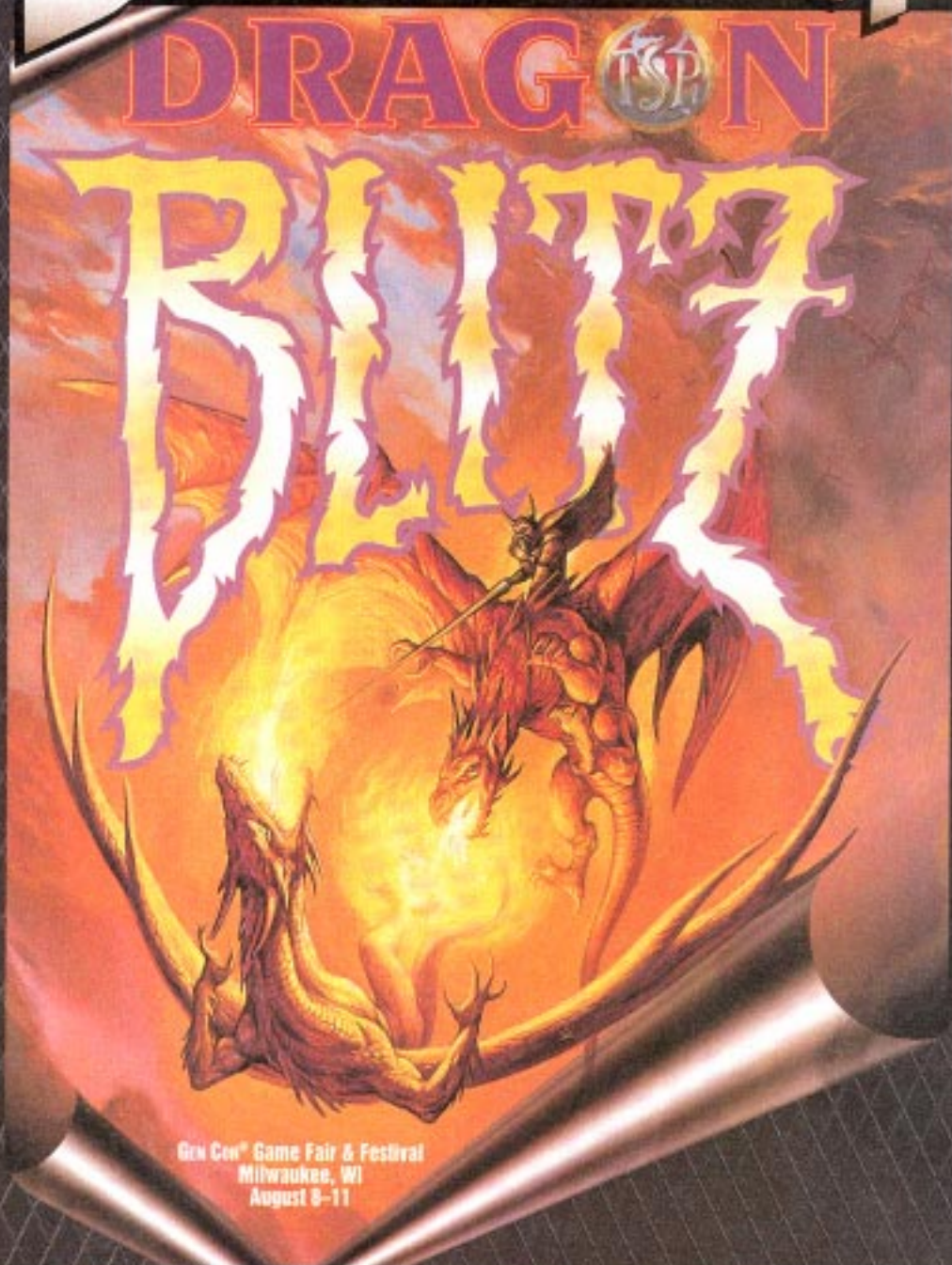
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The Blitz is on!



The 1996 tour has begun. Look for TSR at these conventions, and watch for updates as Dragon Blitz '96 gets underway!

San Diego
Orlando, FL
January 5-7

Club Con
Independence, OH
February 3-4

Orc Con
Los Angeles, CA
February 10-11

Con-Trail
Houston, TX
April 18-21

3-Rivers Game Fest
Pittsburgh, PA
May 24-27

Con-Trail
Pittsburgh, PA
May 24-27

Con-Trail
Pittsburgh, PA
May 24-27

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Pittsburgh, PA
May 24-27

Con-Trail
Pittsburgh, PA
May 24-27

Con-Trail
Pittsburgh, PA
May 24-27

Mid Con
Wichita, KS
January 5-7

Georgie Con
Denver, CO
February 16-18

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Denver, CO
February 16-18

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Con-Trail
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May 24-27



The Wyrms' Turn

Tough Times

It's the year of a presidential election, and things are tough all over.

No, this is not the beginning of some great contemporary fictive opus that I am writing. It is merely my assessment of the way things are.

I'm not going to say that things would be better if we had more Democrats in Congress or a Republican in the White House or a quick demolition of the two-party system. I have my own opinions on these matters, but this is not the place for them... but still, things are tough all over, and that affects *DRAGON® Magazine*.

Paper costs keep rising, mom & pop game shops close, and you, the gentle consumer, have fewer dollars to spend than your parents did when they were your age.

Nobody said life was fair, and there is not much we can do about it — except for *DRAGON Magazine*, that is. If you have less money to spend, then it is up to us to make the magazine even more worthwhile. We can't control the costs of production or the selling price in the market. The only thing that we can control is the value of the magazine itself, and that is our objective.

We want every issue of *DRAGON Magazine* to sing with playable materials that you can't wait to bring to your next Saturday night dungeon crawl. We want you to be wowed by color and black and white art the likes of which you can't find elsewhere. These are the direct responsibilities of Editor Dave Gross and Art Director Larry Smith, and both of them are exceptional at their jobs.

We want *DRAGON Magazine* to be as important to you as *The Wall Street Journal* is to a businessman. We owe it to you, and in tough times, that's the least we can do.

But the buck doesn't stop there. It's a two-way street. You have to tell us what you want, and I don't mean "lower the price" or "more hot

babes" or "why don't you just give it away for free." In the best of all possible worlds we would accommodate all of your desires, but unfortunately we are neither Aladdin's genie nor Bill Clinton, and times *are* tough.

If there is something we can do to make *DRAGON Magazine* better for you, let us know. More GREYHAWK® setting, more art, more fiction, more really ugly NPCs — none of it is out of the question.

Unlike Congress, we are not deadlocked... and we care.

(I would also like to take this opportunity to apologize for any inconvenience you might have experienced in obtaining copies of the past few issues of *DRAGON Magazine* at your local hobby shop or book store. The distributors/chain retailers with whom we do business have embraced what I consider to be an unfortunate and ill-advised buying system philosophy called "just-in-time," whereby they order as few copies up front as possible on all titles, expecting to be able to re-order more inventory instantaneously when they sell out. Magazine print runs are based on initial orders, and since a new issue appears each month, reorders are usually non-existent.

We will always try to estimate the print runs with enough margin to cover your demands, but it is very hard when our distributors/chain retailers are being short-sighted and conservative. In the long run you, the consumer, are the one being most inconvenienced, and of this I am sorry. Once again, I never said that life was fair.)



Brian Thomsen
Associate Publisher &
Ogre

Issue #230 Vol. XXI, No. 1

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June 1996

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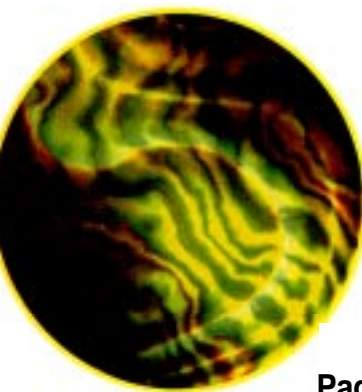
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The Orbs of Dragonkind

Roger E. Moore

Eight powerful artifacts from the world of Oerth, each as dangerous to the wielder as to the dragons they were designed to control.

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Wolfgang Baur

You'll need every possible edge to join the ranks of the dragonslayers.

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Fire on the Five Peaks

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Two of the terrible wyrms of Cerilia are nearly lost to legend. One of them is even more dangerous dead than alive.

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Ed Greenwood

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Rise of the Undead

Dori Hein & Bill Olmesdahl

The first in a new department! Introducing the undead, a powerful new force in the battle for control of Esfah.

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(DRAGONLANCE®: Tales of the Fifth Age)

Mark Anthony

With the passing of the gods of Krynn, what powers might take their place?





Back to Basics

Dear *DRAGON*® Magazine,

Since I have been a subscriber for over 13 years, it should be apparent that I have always enjoyed and gotten my money's worth out of your fine publication. When you announced that you were changing the format, I'll admit that my first thoughts were ones of alarm and doubt; however, being a fair-minded person, I thought the least I could do was give you a chance. I am happy to report that the new format meets with my complete approval. In fact, this is the first time since I began subscribing that I felt the need to write to you, applaud your efforts, and make a few comments.

There are many areas I like in the new format. Still, I feel the main reason I welcome it so much is what I perceive as an overall return to AD&D® game basics. It seems to me that for the last several years, the focus and direction of the magazine has been somewhat ambiguous, kind of plodding along, so to speak. This is just my opinion, of course. I've always been able to get something beneficial out of almost every issue, but the latest three issues — the new format — have been incredibly useful.

One of the articles I found to be the most useful was in issue #225, "Campaign Classics: Three Greyhawk Grimoires." I immediately added these to my own campaign. This brings me to one of the main reasons I wrote this letter. I was extremely disappointed when

TSR decided to stop producing campaigns for this, the original AD&D world. I'm willing to wager there are many old-timers out there like me who are looking for more articles and more modules dealing with this great campaign world.

Being a veteran of the game since 1976 (I still have my original white box set), I can proudly say that I've run the whole gamut of the D&D® and AD&D games. I've tried my best to keep up with the game worlds, but I haven't been entirely successful. Unfortunately, there are many modules and accessories that, due to some reason or other, are now out of print. Note that this has not in any way detracted from my enjoyment of the game. I've come to the realization that I simply cannot keep up with all the latest releases from TSR, so I'll limit myself to the ones that I can get the most use out of. Two of these will be *DRAGON*® Magazine and *DUNGEON*® Adventures (the latter of which I have subscribed to since issue #1).

I'd like to finish this letter by listing my personal favorite departments in the magazine. "Bazaar of the Bizarre" has always been very helpful. The "Ecology" series has also been a real "flesher outer" for my campaign. "Rogues Gallery" has saved me several times by providing me with an interesting NPC I can toss to the players on short notice. The "Dragon's Bestiary" is nice, but I simply can't seem to find the time necessary to detail my campaign setting enough to find places for all the new critters. Maybe someday!

Finally, let me close by saying that, by nature, people are resistant to change. You can't please everybody, so don't try. If you keep the majority of your regular readers happy, that should be considered a job well done. I'm sure you get your full share of negative input and "sour grapes" letters. I thought you might like to get a letter from someone who feels like he's getting his money's worth and who will continue to subscribe.

John H. Major
17521 N. 85th Lane
Peoria, AZ 85382

The "back to basics" theme is important to us, and we'll continue to cover both the newest game settings and the old classics. Our readership includes both long-time players and newcomers to the game, and we'll do our best to provide something for every one. We haven't forgotten the veterans!

Worth their weight in gold

Dear *DRAGON* Magazine,

I'd like to give a huge "Well done!" to Gregory Detwiler, Ed Greenwood, Jean Rabe, Ed Stark, and Roger E. Moore for their parts in making issue #228 of *DRAGON* Magazine. I really like their articles. Another huge well done to everyone else at *DRAGON* Magazine.

I also have an opinion. I think *DRAGON* Magazine should have a spell of the month in each issue, because everyone like spells (except barbarians, of course). If *DRAGON* Magazine thinks the spell is cool, most everyone else will, too!

Oh, and I would like to know how I can purchase a solid gold d20. (I've enclosed a SASE in case of a positive response!)

Yours truly,
Kevin Wayne Jones
Gamer for 11 Years!

We're lucky to have such talented contributors. Two of those you name — Ed and Roger — are featured in this very issue (Ed with the first in a continuing series). Let us know what you think of these latest articles.

We feature new spells very often in our Arcane Lore department. Check out this month's installment for plenty of "spells of the month," which also includes powerful new magical items for dragons. We think they're very cool indeed.

A solid gold d20? Now some of us do have quite a collection of dice, but none so precious as that. If you find some, we want dibs on borrowing them!

Correction

In issue #228, the byline for the article "All in the Family" should be Brian Hudson, not Bryan Hudson. Our apologies to Brian for the misspelling.

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Like the BIRTHRIGHT® setting?

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

Congratulations! I think your new look is very striking. Furthermore, the additions to your interior are superb, to say the least. I think all of your new features make for an even better magazine.

Now that all my lavish praise is out of the way, I have a few questions. Is this BIRTHRIGHT setting going to be as good as it looks? Will there be one of those excellent domain sourcebooks for each realm on Cerilia? They're indispensable as a tool for me as DM. They are so good that I don't even let my players have them. At least not yet.

Keep up the good work!
Semper fi!

LCPL Guzman Acha
12th Marines
Okinawa, Japan

Since you asked, yes, we think BIRTHRIGHT is every bit as good as it looks. In fact, two of us (Tony and Dave) are planning to start a BIRTHRIGHT campaign soon.

There are no plans for covering every domain on Cerilia with a Player's Secrets sourcebook, but there will be plenty for each of the five sections of Cerilia as the campaign unfolds. They're meant for the players as much as the DM, so share them!

Keep an eye on these pages for more information on the campaign setting, including this issue's "Fire on the Five Peaks" and "Rogue's Gallery."

New Player

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

My name is Deanna. I just started role-playing, and I also occasionally play the SPELLFIRE™ CARD game.

I really like the DRAGONLANCE® setting and have read many of the books. I have really been enjoying your magazine, and I love the humorous stuff, like "101 Uses for a Wet Blanket." I'm enjoying the DRAGONLANCE story and can't wait to hear more of what's happening on Krynn. I was wondering if you could put some more DRAGONLANCE stuff in the magazine (like further backgrounds or info on the characters). If possible, add my address to the letters column so people can write to me with tips on playing or with any information about the DRAGONLANCE world that might be interesting. I would really appreciate it.

Deanna Boynton
General Delivery
Moonstone, Ontario
Canada
L0K 1N0

Your wish is our command, Deanna. In addition to the DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE™ story arc this year, look for a preview of the new FIFTH AGE game next issue. Once the game is released in August you can count on more articles featuring the new heroes and adventures of the DRAGONLANCE setting. We hope that some of those articles will come from readers like you.



On the Cover

This month we are pleased to present the first appearance of the art of R.K. Post on our covers. (It's been some time since we offered up a new talent on our cover; our contributing artists have kept my files full of great images.)

There's a kind of offbeat symbolism in assigning a new artist to our 20th Anniversary cover. R.K., a relative newcomer to the field, represents what we feel is a direction that many young illustrators are moving toward – a return to the goal of presenting high quality concepts through the use of excellent technique and style.

That's a philosophy that works for R.K. Post, and it works for *DRAGON® Magazine*.

Write to us!

If you have a comment, opinion, or question for the editors of *DRAGON® Magazine*, write us a letter. We'd like to hear from you.

In the United States and Canada, send any mail to D-mail, *DRAGON Magazine*, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147 USA. In Europe, send mail to Letters, *DRAGON Magazine*, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

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THE ORBS OF DRAGONKIND

The equalizers

by Roger E. Moore

illustrated by Larry Smith

This article can be handed to players in an AD&D® game **GREYHAWK™** campaign as an adventure starter. The time is early spring, in the year 585 **cy**, at the close of the Greyhawk Wars. The DM should have access to the *From the Ashes* boxed set, which sets up the background to the following.

This material takes the form of a letter written upon expensive pages of fine paper and secured in an ivory scroll tube, hurriedly buried under a flat rock in a shallow cave only 12 miles east of the ruins of Chathold, in Almor (a kingdom recently destroyed during the Greyhawk Wars). The cave floor and walls show evidence of a magical struggle involving fiery and rock-deforming spells, with large, inhuman footprints all around — footprints more fiendish than draconic, however.

Obviously, the PCs must somehow discover the letter. It is suggested that the renowned wizard Mordenkainen contacts the PCs to search for a missing member of the Circle of Five, portly Otto, who is believed to have gone to Almor to search for his henchman, the priestess Johanna. Both Otto and Johanna hailed from Almor's capital, Chathold, before its total destruction. Mordenkainen makes no mention of the *orbs of dragonkind*, as he is not yet aware of the problem detailed in the letter.

Once the PCs arrive in the vicinity of Chathold, they should be able to find (with some effort) a few cowering and brutalized peasants who recall seeing someone fitting Johanna's description several weeks ago. She lived in a cave, one person reports. If the PCs explore that cave, they might discover the scroll case, and their *real* adventure — such as the DM designs it from here — has at last begun.

The portly wizard Otto is described in *WGA4 Vecna Lives!*, pages 86 and 87, and in *The City of Greyhawk* boxed set, *Greyhawk: Folk, Feuds, and Factions* booklet, page 23. His henchman, the priestess Johanna, appears in *WGA4 Vecna Lives!*, pages 91 and 92. The sad fate of Almor is outlined in the *From the Ashes* boxed set, *Atlas of the Flanaess* booklet, page 27.

Sunset, 8th of Coldeven

My dearest friend and ally, Johanna,

Your letter of the 5th arrived here in my residence on the same night, as no doubt you hoped it would, but I fear I was dining out alone that evening in a vain attempt to calm my anxieties over your safety; I did not enter my study until last night. I regret I was not here to read your words and share in your grief, as I do now. Please accept my apologies and know that I wept long when I read of your poor family's fate. I remember your two brothers as if they were my own. I curse the beasts who delivered them and all in Chathold to such unspeakable evil. There will be vengeance for this from me, I swear this night by Boccob's brow, a vengeance that will burn even the heart of a fiend.

I must also tell you that I was profoundly distressed to read of the rumors you have heard regarding a white orb said to have been seen in the claws of the Great Murderer of Almor, Duke Szeffrin. This was news of the worst sort, and your report regarding the powers that the orb is said to possess has only fed my nightmare that a true artifact has fallen into the possession of our hated enemies. That this orb is held by an undead wretch such as Szeffrin is ghastly news; between this and word of your brothers, I have been robbed of my appetite, and I have scarcely eaten for a day now. I have sent urgent word to Mordenkainen through Jallarzi to meet with him, since he has resources that I lack, but she returned and said he was "out," likely swapping tales with that vile goat of a spell-hurler from Faerun — rot him for delaying Mord in this hour of need! But I have been tardy as well, and we must as a consequence handle this matter on our own.

The "white sphere" that you described as "engraved with myriad serpents or dragons" is very likely one of our world's Orbs of Dragonkind. You have heard of these, assuredly, but in the event that you have made no further study of these artifacts, I am attaching a copy of a short paper I wrote on this subject, which I read before the Eight only four years past on Midsummer's Night, 581 **cy**. At the time, this information was little more



than a part of a pet project to catalog the three or four dozen families of artifacts of this great continent of Oerik, but now the matter lies at the center of my worst dreads.

The information that I impart to you must be kept only to yourself for now. Thanks to my many private connections among the nobility of the central Flanaess, I have had access to records in archives and libraries where no outsider would normally be welcome, much less left alive once discovered. The general release of this information would, first, endanger my treasured connections and, second, threaten our whole, bloodied world, as it might motivate any number of individuals and forces, from greed-ridden half-heroes down to such Abyss-spawned nightmares as sit upon the thrones of Dorakaa and Rauxes to go in search of these orbs and the great powers they possess. You and I would be in the very snake pit of danger ourselves, since some of my research drew upon materials secured in ruins beneath the Sea of Dust, guarded by intolerant fiends who would not appreciate knowing I had been there among their treasures.

Read, then, and understand my fears.

The Orbs of Dragonkind

Magical creations are sometimes developed in parallel to a surprising degree of similarity. One of the most famous cases of such independent convergence of thought concerns the Orbs of Dragonkind, examples of which have been recorded on no less than six different worlds. While the specifics of each case vary considerably, with such orbs covering a wide range in size, composition, power, number, and purpose, all such items were created with the intent of bestowing upon the user a measure of mastery over dragons. Doubtless, some such devices have inspired the creation of others, but certain dragon-affecting orbs seem to have had no antecedent in their lands — the Dragon Orbs of Ansalon, for example, or the Orbs of Draconic Influence of Faerun.

Why this consistent combination of orbs and dragon control? What is confusing to the commoner is obvious to anyone who has long studied the matter. The orb represents an eye, and eye contact is crucial among all dragons in establishing communication, dominance, and intent. No other geometric shape has the power so quickly to arrest

a dragon's attention and make it prey to whatever powers the user would work on the creature's mind and will.

Oerth, it is well known, has its own Orbs of Dragonkind, but their oral and written history is poorly known even to the learned. Sages have long suspected a connection between these orbs and the long-lost Suel Imperium (Suloise Empire, Empire of the Suel, whatever), dead just over ten centuries. I have recently finished my own investigation into this topic, and I now offer you the results, sparing you my bibliography and the harrowing tale of my research until later this evening, after the fine dinner that I have prepared for your digestive education. Attend my words:

In the ancient days of the maturing Suloise Empire, starting about -2400 cy, a great series of wars was fought between the emperor's forces and the various monsters that populated the southern Crystallist Mountains, what we now call the Hellfurnaces. The emperor, Inzhilem II of the House of Neheli-Arztin, was a surpassing wizard, the fifth such among the Suloise to be known as a Mage of Power. Inzhilem wished to establish mines deep within the Crystallists to harvest rare minerals

DM's Information

The following information on the *orbs of dragonkind* is only suggested. Any Dungeon Master who uses this material in a campaign is strongly urged to alter the particulars to prevent any players from knowing the actual powers of any device in play. For example, *suggestion* or *hold* could be substituted for *charm* in some orbs, or different curses could come into play. The Intelligence and Ego scores may also be adjusted to make the orbs more or less powerful; as they are very old, the magic empowering them may have waxed or waned over the millennia, or could even have become variable and unpredictable. Lastly, it is possible that one or more orbs have lost their powers entirely; this would not affect the functioning of any other orb, however.

An *orb of dragonkind* can be operated only by physically picking it up, and only intelligent beings, living or undead — not golems or nonliving constructs — can operate them. If the sum of the user's Intelligence and Wisdom scores is greater than the sum of the orb's Intelligence and Ego, the user gains con-

trol of the orb. If the two sums are equal, the user is *paralyzed* for 2-5 rounds by the struggle for control of his body, and he can take no other action. After this, he can drop the orb and move freely.

If the user's Intelligence and Wisdom sum is less than the orb's Intelligence and Ego sum, the user is immediately *possessed* by a malign intelligence in the orb. The user is quickly ordered to slay himself using the most rapid and effec-

tive means possible; this command overrides all normal urges toward self-preservation. The user does not put down the orb but carries out this command one-handed, if possible, or else seeks destruction by means such as jumping off a cliff, offering himself to an oncoming dragon without any attempt at self-defense, injuring himself in a vital spot with a dagger or axe, etc. Self-inflicted injuries inflict double maximum possible damage and cause the user to save vs. system shock (according to his Constitution score) to avoid dying immediately. *Feebleminded* persons are instantly subjected to this curse. Insane persons are assumed to have an Intelligence of 50% normal (drop fractions); *charmed* persons are assumed to have a Wisdom of 50% normal (drop fractions). This power should be played out forcefully to encourage caution among PCs in dealing with the orbs.

If a nonhuman creature seizes an orb, randomly generate the creature's Intelligence and double it to get the equivalent of a combined Intelligence and Wisdom. Compare the result to the orb's combined Intelligence and Ego,



and crystals for his personal research, though he also had a niggling interest in throwing back some of the humanoid and draconic monsters that periodically raided the eastern provinces of his empire and reduced their taxable resources.

Imperial armies, even supported by military wizardry, found themselves hard pressed by their opposition. The great families of red dragons throughout the southern Crystalmists had enslaved limitless numbers of brutish humanoids for use as sword-fodder, originally to attack one another's territories or bring in additional treasures. These armies of orcs and goblinkind were now turned upon the empire's soldiers, hurling themselves into battle with great ferocity and in numbers that well made up for their lack of skill or foresight.

In addition, these dragons were exceedingly skilled at magic; baneful extraplanar powers supplied them with secret knowledge of spellcasting in return for great sacrifices of wealth. Worse yet, certain of those red dragons had undergone sorcerous rituals that infused their living bodies with shadow-stuff from the Demiplane of Shadow, granting them new and devastating

powers. These were the first of the accursed shadow dragons, and they and their servants built a vast network of caverns, halls, and tunnels beneath the Crystalmists that exists even to this day. Even the great Vault of the Drow is said by some sources once to have been the cavern-hall of an elder shadow dragon of this bygone age, some treasures of which may still lie hidden thereabouts. (The gods grant us that these treasures yet remain undiscovered by the drow!)

Facing such evil strength, the army commanders sent word to Inzhilem that the issue was in doubt, and they asked for his personal intervention. Angered at first that his armies could do no more than hold their own against mere dragons and orcs, Inzhilem quickly became intrigued by the difficult problem posed by the Fiery Kings, as the troublesome dragons were known in the eastern lands. He returned to the capital to remedy the situation.

Historical references to Inzhilem's studies are sparse and contradictory. He was not in the habit of recording his thoughts and deeds for posterity's sake. It is recorded in several places, however, that Inzhilem called upon and gained the direct assistance of the Suel deity

Wee Jas herself, who in those early days was of greater aspect and power than she is now, and less concerned with matters of death than of pure sorcery. Legend has it that other gods favoring humanity were involved as well, though their names are lost; indeed, some of them may now be dead and forgotten. Myth and legend claim that all these gods were benevolent, but I have grave reservations about this. Whatever sources he used, Inzhilem gained sufficient knowledge to produce a solution.

The emperor elected to construct a limited number of identical artifacts that would give his forces the ability to confront and destroy the Fiery Kings. Knowing the great importance that dragons attach to direct eye contact, which among the most paranoid and wicked of them is regarded as a challenge resulting in an immediate fight to the death, Inzhilem set upon the orb as the ideal form for these surpassing devices. Each orb would be carried into battle by a war-trained wizard and used to subdue, assault, or defend against all dragons present, while a group of elite soldiers and battle-priests who accompanied the wizard would move swiftly to finish off the draconic foes; this group would

then carry out the results. This applies to dragons as well, who are themselves subject to self-destruction if they fall victim to an orb. A dragon of Oerik who has heard of the *orbs of dragonkind* — and about 85% of them have — immediately attempts to destroy anyone using an orb and also tries to hide the orb without directly touching it.

Anyone who picks up an orb and is able to control it as noted above is made immediately aware of all the orb's powers, but *not* its curses, if such exist. The powers of an orb can be used only while it is held; powers that require concentration are broken if the orb is no longer held (not *charm*, for instance). The level of all orb-generated spells, where applicable, is the 25th. Only one power may be used at a time, unless the power is listed as "at will" — e.g., for *infravision* or *speaking with dragons* — or unless the power provides a continual bonus to saving throws or adjusts the user's Armor Class. The user cannot engage in any physical, magical, or psionic attacks or defenses while holding the orb, due to the constant concentration necessary to resist falling

prey to it. The user may walk at steady pace at half the normal movement rate (e.g., MV 6 if the user is a human or elf) while using any orb.

Monsters that can be considered dragonlike or part-dragon (wyverns, fire lizards, chimeras, dragon turtles, dragons, undead dragons like *dracoliches*, pseudodragons, half-dragons, etc.) can be affected by orb powers normally

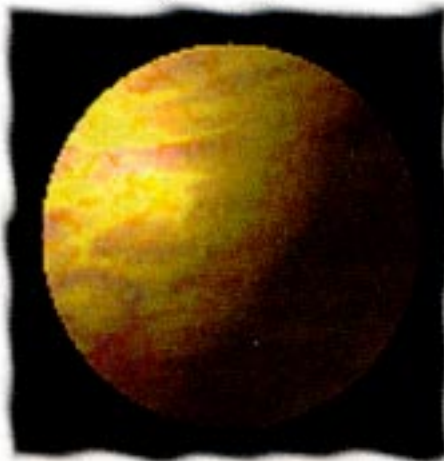
affecting only true dragons, but these powers have a 50% chance of failing completely before any saving throws are checked, as if dragonlike monsters had a 50% magic resistance to those powers. Divine draconic beings also have a 50% chance of being unaffected by the powers of these artifacts, but they also gain their true magic resistance roll and saving throws afterward — and they will be very, very angry with the orb user.

All *orbs of dragonkind* radiate great evil, specifically neutral evil, and certain PCs such as paladins should be wary of their use. Their alignment was masked early in the existence of these orbs, but the long centuries have worn away all such "cloaking" spells now.

The *speaking with dragons* power is as per the *speaking with monsters* spell, only limited to dragons and useable at will.

The *charm* power may be cast once per turn, up to three times per day, against any dragon of no more than the age level given (see *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome, page 64). The *charm* has a range of 60', and the subject must be awake and aware of the orb user; the subject will certainly attack the orb user if the

Orb of the Wyrmkin



accompany a regular army, which would carry the battle to the dragon's humanoid supporters. This use of an orb with combined forces is important, as a single orb was not meant to be carried out alone against a many-talented foe like a dragon, much less the countless underlings who would soon overwhelm a lone orb-bearer. This misconception of the powers and uses of these orbs has likely undone more than one champion who was fortunate enough to gain an orb yet unfortunate enough to use it unwisely and alone, perishing as a consequence.

Furthermore, Inzhilem planned that each orb would be useful against every sort of evil dragon known, not merely against the red and shadow varieties. To accomplish this, Inzhilem was forced to have his entire collection of caged and charmed dragons in the capital gardens slain by sorcerous means. A portion of the blood, bone, brain, and spirit of each dragon was captured and imprisoned in each orb, though the orbs themselves were not meant to contain true intelligence as such. So strong were the enchantments with which Inzhilem hoped to fill the orbs that rumors flew that every cruel dragon on Oerth would

fall prey to them, and the evil races of dragonkind would be wholly exterminated and cast into myth.

It was calculated that eight orbs would be enough to deal with matters in the east. According to one record I examined, Inzhilem secretly directed the Imperial Congress about the year -2360 CY to produce such wizards as would be necessary to assist him in the mighty enchantments that would have to be cast. Again, history fails to reveal all that followed, but one major event in the following years has survived for the telling. A smoldering feud within the House of Neheli-Arztin flared into violence in -2354 CY, and Inzhilem II was slain and destroyed beyond recovery before the struggle had ended. The partial house of Arztin ceased to exist as a result of retaliation, and the victorious partial house of Neheli kept the throne. Ubrond Thirteen ("Third-Eye") became emperor.

A devoted but unremarkable ruler, Ubrond apparently continued the project to produce the orbs and saw it through to its finish, but considerable interference took place and the original plan for the project went inexplicably awry. Eight orbs were still made (the date of their completion has been lost,

but it was after -2350 CY), but the orbs were now of differing sizes and powers, each oriented toward the control of dragons of differing ages. The reason for this alteration has never been made clear, as it certainly reduced the effectiveness of these orbs when used in battle against dragons of ages older than allowed for by any one orb.

This alteration was not the only one made, and certainly some of these alterations were performed without the knowledge or approval of the emperor or his staff. I conjecture that the Fiery Kings were able to insinuate agents among the wizards involved in the project, and without Inzhilem's ability to grasp the full scope of the work and oversee the critical details, errors and even curses were worked into many of the final products. It is clearly known, for instance, that each Orb of Dragonkind possesses a malign, innate intelligence that attempts to overwhelm and destroy any user. Furthermore, each orb was given the power to affect good and neutral dragons as well as evil ones — an obvious addition by the fiery kings.

Once finished, the eight orbs were given names corresponding to the age level of the dragons they were meant to

charm fails to "take." Evil dragons gain no saving throw, neutral dragons save at -4, and good dragons save at -2. The *charm* has a normal duration based on the subject's Intelligence, and the power may be broken in any of the usual ways, as per the spell *charm person*.

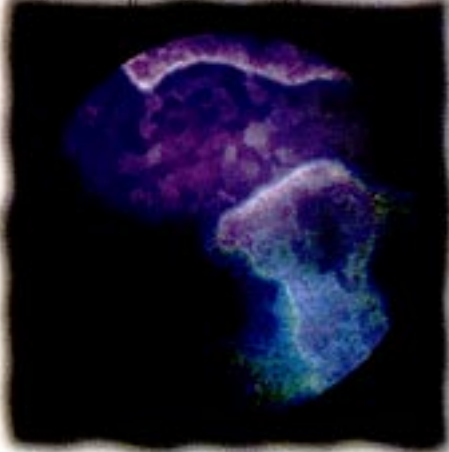
If two orbs are brought within one mile of each other, they function normally, but each sends out a magical summons that attracts all dragons and dragonlike beings within a radius of 100 miles around each orb. The dragons do not know what is "calling" to them, but they feel impelled to arrive in the vicinity of the orbs by the quickest means possible. This effect is unknown to all in the present day.

Worse, if two orbs are touched together, they cease functioning entirely for a full day, except to send out a magical pulse that *enrages* all dragons and dragonlike beings within 10 miles if such fail to save vs. spells at -4. *Charmed* dragons are freed of their *charms* at once. An *enraged* dragon gains a +2 bonus to all attack and damage rolls, and a +4 bonus to save against all mind-affecting spells (*charm*, *hold*, *fear*,

suggestion, *hypnotism*, etc.). The *enraged* dragons converge on the spot where the orbs touched, fighting one another if they do not see creatures of any other race they can fight first. This state lasts for 10-40 rounds per dragon.

No one knows what would happen if three or more orbs were brought together or touched together. It is certain to be a bad thing, however.

Orb of the Dragonette



Orb of the Hatchling

Intelligence 9, Ego 9; Diameter 3".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon of very young age (15 years) or less; +1 to all saving throws and Armor Class of user, continuously; *clairvoyance* eight times per day; *infravision*, 120' range, at will.

Curses: *Possession* (as above).

Disposition: This orb is — or was, rather — in Rauxes, but it is constantly being stolen and recovered by jealous, greedy fiends, liches, wizards, priests, vampires, animuses, and such, each of whom believes the orb will somehow direct him, her, or it to all the other missing orbs. Though little word of the orb has leaked to the outside world, possession of it is continually but secretly sought in the total chaos that fills this wretched city. Almost no real use of the orb is actually being made, and no one yet realizes they are on a (fantastically deadly) wild goose chase.

The orb that Duke Szeffrin possesses is this one; his agents stole it. Tales of its size and powers were exaggerations, but they were close enough to the

fight. In order from the smallest orb up, they were the Orb of the Hatchling, the Orb of the Wyrmlin, the Orb of the Dragonette, the Orb of the Dragon, the Orb of the Great Serpent, the Orb of the Firedrake, the Orb of the Elder Wyrmlin, and the Orb of the Eternal Grand Dragon. When not activated, each orb was a light, solid sphere of purest white jade, completely and elaborately carved with the entwined figures of dragons in battle with one another. None of these orbs could be damaged in the least by mundane forces, nor could any beast or animated construct bring them harm. If there were any means developed for their destruction, they have long been lost.

It may be presumed that these orbs were delivered to the Suloise armies and brought into combat with the Fiery Kings, but there is a break in the historical record here. A curious fragment exists that appears to be a message from a provincial lord to the emperor — whose name is not given — asking for the latter's intervention to "deliver us from those who hold the stolen Globe." Considerable strife between army commanders is also noted in some dispatches from the eastern provinces, with several references to

a renegade officer, apparently mad, who called himself the King of the Fire Kings. It is apparent that one or more of the orbs either fell into enemy hands, was seized as part of a coup, or possessed a power or curse that led its user into insanity or rebellion.

As best as can be told, only five of the orbs remained in the hands of the Suel until the time just before the Rain of Colorless Fire. I managed to secure several authoritative accounts — from a source I cannot discuss openly, so I must beg your forgiveness — that list these five as the Orb of the Hatchling, the Orb of the Dragonette, the Orb of the Dragon, the Great Firedrake's Orb, and the Orb of the Elder Worm. Some of you are surely aware of the contrary legends that five, not eight, orbs exist on our world, and I believe that this discrepancy resulted because three had been lost or fallen into the hands of the enemies of the Suel in the empire's last days. I think that the Baklunish held at least one orb, but I have as yet found no evidence of this; perhaps our resident Kettite, Rary, will investigate and enlighten us! Despite the slight renaming of some of the orbs in late-empire records, I believe the missing original orbs to have been the Orb of the

Wyrmlin, the Orb of the Great Serpent, and the most powerful of them all, the Orb of the Eternal Grand Dragon.

After the Rain of Colorless Fire, the historical record is dotted with appearances of these orbs, but very rarely is the exact identity of each orb known for certain. Obviously, most or all of the orbs were transported out of the empire before it was burnt into ashes. One orb, a small one said to be the size of a man's fist, was held in Rauxes by the Overkings in the youthful days of Aerdy, until it was stolen after two centuries by unknown thieves. Another, a larger one, was discovered and lost in 311 CY by explorers in the Hellfurnaces, though this report is confusing in details. Everyone in the Flanaess must know the tale of the mad Zagig Yragerne, who is said to have taken a large white crystal ball with him when he left this city one spring day in 361 CY and returned the following week with a hoard of treasure such as only a succession of kings would know, using some of these riches of course to build Castle Greyhawk. He returned here without the white ball, however, and never spoke of it nor even acknowledged its existence before or afterward.

description of the orb of the great serpent to cause Otto reasonable distress. Otto and Johanna, however, have run afoul of several of the factions murderously competing for the orb, and PCs sent in to rescue them will have their hands full, risking constant and brutal attack and treachery. The chances are very great of making at least three powerful, life-long enemies of the DM's design from this adventure.

Orb of the Wyrmlin

Intelligence 10, Ego 10; Diameter 4".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon of young age (25 years) or less; *dispel magic* three times per day; *detect magic* three times per day; +3 bonus to saving throws vs. fire and heat, continuously.

Curses: *Possession* (as above). After six continuous hours of use, the user also develops a permanent body odor that repels all mammalian life within a 30' radius. This odor causes mild nausea in humans, demihumans, and humanoids, but it does not affect their combat or defensive abilities. Significant reaction,

morale, and loyalty penalties (-4 is suggested) should be assessed against any NPCs who work for the user, with all but the most devoted henchmen eventually leaving the user for good. This body odor can be undone only by using a *wish*.

Disposition: Stolen by Suloise officers during an attempted coup in an eastern province of the old empire, this orb was

taken out of the empire by survivors of the rebellion and eventually lost in a shipwreck in Jeklea Bay, just south of Port Toli. The wreck has disintegrated, but the orb is now in the treasure pile of an old kraken known locally as Slash Eye, which preys now and then on Sea Barons and Scarlet Brotherhood ships. The kraken knows the orb is magical and evil, but nothing else of it.

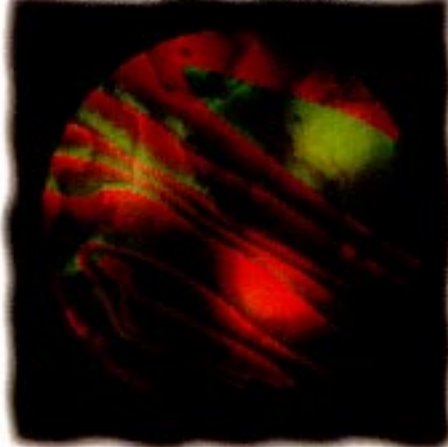
Orb of the Dragonette

Intelligence 11, Ego 11; Diameter 5".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon of juvenile age (50 years) or less; *slow* once per day; +2 bonus to all saving throws and Armor Class, continuously; user is immune to fear of any sort, continuously; user can *fly* twice per day.

Curses: *Possession*, as above. This item was created with a defect that causes the orb to drain living energy from the user's own body when it is held, making this artifact a parasite. One hit point per turn is drained away in this manner, though the user does not notice this loss until 50% of his hit points are gone, at which

Orb of the Dragon



I have counted about two dozen other confirmed or probable appearances of the orbs between the fall of the Suloise Empire and the present day. The location of only one orb is known for certain to our cozy group of the Eight: The Orb of the Hatchling is unquestionably held in Rauxes, as Mordenkainen himself was able to demonstrate to our satisfaction last year. It is almost certainly the same orb held by Aerdy's early overkings, but we do not know yet where the orb was found, how it was recovered, the uses to which it is being put, or the identity of its true owner or master.

Unlike the sections of the fabled Rod of Seven Parts, the various Orbs of Dragonkind have never been reported to indicate the presence of any of their fellow orbs, for which I am sure we can all be thankful. No spell, not even a Wish, and some say not even a god, will reveal the location of an orb; you simply have to be lucky enough to find one and know it for what it is. They seem to function independently of one another, though tales circulate that unexpected abilities become manifest when two orbs are brought into proximity of one another. I believe most of these stories are exaggerations and falsehoods, but I

cannot discount the possibility. Time, perhaps, will tell.

What do the dragons think of the Orbs of Dragonkind? The dragons hate them, of course, as they would hate anything that would give mastery over them to some other race. There is only one tale of a dragon gaining an orb, but it is quite fanciful and its information is subject to grave doubt. The dragon in the tale slays a wicked knight who stole a magical white ball and attempted to control the beast. The dragon then took the ball into its lair and hid it away from humans forever. I cannot say what would happen if an orb was collected by a dragon, whether good or ill would result from this. Surely, I think, this has happened at least once in the past, but we do not know the truth.

You have all been most patient with me, and I now arrive at the core of my lecture. My research has also disclosed new information on the actual powers of these spheres. I will, as I mentioned earlier, cover my sources later. For now, here are those powers whose existence has been proven beyond doubt, as well as the most reliable information on other potential powers.

Orb of the Hatchling

This, the least of the eight orbs, is three inches across and easily fits into a pouch or pocket. As this orb was used in public by the early Aerdy Overkings upon small captive dragons, its powers are clearly established for anyone who researches the matter.

This orb, like ail of its kind, confers upon the one who holds it the ability to converse openly with any dragons within hearing, both understanding the dragons and being understood by them. Further, the orb upon command casts a charm that affects a single young dragon aged five years or less, of any type or scale color, the spell being so potent that the beast finds it difficult, if not impossible, to resist. Thus the dragon may be led into captivity or slain from surprise, if action is swift.

This orb has a mind of its own whose thoughts are devoted to wickedness and revenge. This is the weakest of all the orbs, and its mind is weak as well. Still, the user must have above-average intelligence and insight to maintain control over the globe, or else disaster results. This was sufficiently and tragically proven when Overking Erhart I allowed his eldest son to handle the Orb of the

point he feels very tired and looks weak and pale. Each round spent doing nothing but eating and drinking restores one hit point. The DM should keep track of food and water supplies, which should be depleted at an extraordinary rate.

Disposition: A Suloise archmage fleeing the destruction of her homeland *teleported* herself and the orb she was assigned to guard and use to a secret island hideout in the Solnor Ocean. She waited there for other wizards from her military group to join her, but they had all perished in the Rain of Colorless Fire. The archmage further secured the small island, set up a home in a series of sea caves, and eventually died peacefully there, the orb hidden away. The island was later surrounded by sahuagin and used as a waypoint for transoceanic flights by bronze dragons. The orb was found by the sahuagin, who currently use it to *charm* young dragons to perform evil deeds, like destroying ships.

Orb of the Dragon

Intelligence 12, Ego 12; Diameter 6".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon

of adult age (200 years) or less; *magic missile* three times per day; *teleport without error* twice per day; *detect invisibility* at will; +2 bonus to all saving throws and Armor Class, continuously; user is immune to *fear* or *charm* of any sort, continuously.

Curses: *Possession*, as above. A flaw in the production and enchanting of this orb causes it to build up a static charge

inside that is discharged unpredictably. Every time that certain powers of this orb are activated (e.g., *charm*, *magic missile*, *teleport without error*, or *detect invisibility*), there is a 10% chance that the user is shocked for 6d6 hp electrical damage (no saving throw possible); beings within 10' of the user are struck for 3d6 hp damage (save for half). The user gains no advance warning of an imminent discharge.

Disposition: This orb was not taken out of the Empire of the Suel before the Rain of Colorless Fire. It remained for centuries buried in the ruins of the capital, now referred to as the Forgotten City, until it was found by a group of adventurers from the Hold of the Sea Princes. The orb managed to destroy several in the group by *possession* or shock; it was left in a ruined city on the eastern edge of the Sea of Dust by the survivors, who never made it back to the Hold. The orb was recovered by another group from the Yeomanry, who recognized it as an *orb of dragonkind* and secretly brought it to a town near Loftwick for their own use.

The orb's dangers limited its useful-



Hatchling in 98 cy; the orb proved too much for the youth, who evaded his father and threw himself over a parapet, dying of his injuries that evening. The orb was recovered in an undamaged state, of course, though it had fallen eighty feet to a stone-paved courtyard. After this, the orb was locked away beneath the castle until its theft only fifteen years later.

Beyond its ability to charm young dragons, this orb appears to confer a low degree of magical protection on the one using it. It also grants the user the ability to see heat sources in darkness out to forty yards, and it bestows the spell *clairvoyance* at least six times a day, at the user's will. It is thus useful, but hardly a grand artifact.

Orb of the Wyrmlin

This remains one of the least known of the eight artifacts of its family. It likely confers the same communication powers of the next smaller orb but can charm dragons of slightly older ages. I would guess that it is four inches across. One of my sources refers to this orb as cursed but does not say in what way; the Suel hated to give away any secrets that an enemy might use against them, and they

hated to admit to failure. We must pass this one by for now and move on.

Orb of the Dragonette

Interestingly, this orb is unmistakably mentioned several times in ancient Suloise literature. One wizard was said to have used the orb to fly over the countryside and scout for monsters and other enemies of the Suel Imperium, which the orb was capable of stunning. This five-inch orb vanished after the Rain of Colorless Fire and may still lie beneath the ash of the Sea of Dust.

Orb of the Dragon

This, like the previous orb, vanished without a trace after the fall of the Suel Imperium and probably still lies buried there. I discovered little about it, except that it was rarely used thanks to a flaw in its construction that killed one commander who used it. It is six inches in diameter.

Orb of the Great Serpent

Ah! This might have been the orb that Zagig himself used in that great battle in which he won his own dragon's hoard. Several legends and tales about the Orbs of Dragonkind refer to one the

size of a man's head (this one would be seven inches, so its about right) that could blast enemies with waves of cold and ice, or turn aside the largest red dragon's breath. A useful item to the Suloise long ago, no doubt! This orb is probably still at large somewhere in the Flanaess, but where, I cannot say.

Orb of the Firedrake

All the comments I made about the previous orb apply to this one, too. This one would be eight inches across, but I have found no records to distinguish it from the other. I assume from the title that it is effective against red dragons, but who can say?

Orb of the Elder Wyrmlin

Nine inches across, this orb was the largest one in the Suel Imperium at the time of its fall, and it had a black reputation. Though it had great powers by all accounts, and could kill any beast with but a word from the user, tales have filtered down that the orb was alive in some way and demanded blood for its favors. This is very possible, as I have seen notes that convicted criminals were attached to the army unit to which this orb was assigned, but no provisions

ness during the giant and humanoid incursions in Sterich and Geoff, but it is still being held in a secret place known only to the survivors of the expedition. (They did not tell the government of their discovery, believing they know best how to use it.) Soon this orb will be brought out of hiding and used to repel a minor invasion of giants from the Jotens — but what will happen then, no one can say.

Orb of the Great Serpent

Intelligence 13, Ego 13; Diameter 7".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above, but see "Curses"); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon of mature adult age (400 years) or less; *cone of cold* (12d4+12 hp damage) three times per day; *true seeing* once per day; user is immune to all fire and heat attacks, continuously; user gains +1 Intelligence, continuously; *protection vs. normal missiles*, continuously (originally used as protection against humanoid archers).

Curses: Possession, as above. Evil

wizards in the employ of the Fiery Kings of the southern Crystalmists also managed to introduce a "minor" magical flaw. Any use of the *Speak with dragons* power causes the speaker's words to change to vile insults in draconic tongues. There is a 50% chance after each such use that any



dragon listening immediately attacks the orb user with intent to kill, using breath weapons or spells first.

A second and more serious flaw exists in this orb, in that anyone using it must save vs. spell (all Wisdom bonuses are applicable) once per round to avoid *charming* any dragon or dragonlike being he sees and forcing that creature to become his servant. This powerful compulsion extends to *charming* good and neutral dragons as well as evil ones. To make matters worse, each use of the *charm* power of this artifact permanently drains one hit point from the user, and these lost hit points cannot be replaced except by the use of *wishes* (one hit point returned per *wish* used).

Disposition: Taken out of the Suloise Empire by Baklunish thieves long before the Rain of Colorless Fire, this orb passed through many hands over the following centuries, generating many of the tales now heard of the *orbs of dragonkind* across the Flanaess. After it was used by Zagig Yragerne in 361 cy, he

were sent along for the prisoners beyond food for a few days. Were they executed by the orb or its user? It is possible. Even the commanders were loathe to use this device in the face of attacks by dragons, so its evil nature must have been great.

Orb of the Eternal Grand Dragon

I would love to say that I know something about this orb, but oddly even the Suloise records are sparse about it, and the Suloise loved to brag when they had something worth bragging about. There is a note or two to the effect that this largest of all orbs, ten inches across, was kept securely locked away most of the time, but this is understandable if it was terribly powerful. It is curious, however, that there is no mention of its use during any battle.



This concludes my little look at the Orbs of Dragonkind, and not a moment too soon, as I believe our dinners should be ready at last. We will take this topic up again, but first — let us eat!

Johanna, I have little more to add to this missive; the hour is late, and I have much to do. I hope to join you in Almor by the morrow at dusk. Should you be discovered by unwholesome forces, you must destroy this letter at once and, dare I add, speak to no one of its contents. We must immediately seek out our common enemy, the murderous duke, and we must take from him that which he cannot be allowed to have. If the orb is indeed the size of the duke's skull, as you have heard, then it is surely one of the more powerful of the orbs, and with it he could likely break the stalemate that has kept poor, crippled Nyrond from total collapse and ruin. I will warn the rest of the Five of my intentions, but we cannot wait for them to act. Let us pray that Boccob has given us such insight and knowledge as we need to bring this crisis to a satisfactory close.

And if, as a consequence of our actions, grief should befall the Great Murderer of Almor, Szeffrin, then we may take home with us the cold certainty that your brothers — indeed, our whole ruined nation — have in some small way been avenged.

I remain ever faithfully yours, dear Johanna,

Otto

a flaw in that it drains power from the user. In this case, the user ages 10d4 years each time that the *charm*, *stone to flesh*, or *dispel magic* powers are used; there is no saving throw against this flaw. This may cause the user's hair to turn white, skin to wrinkle, etc. The DM should determine the normal age to which the user would live and keep careful track of "used up" years. If the user ages beyond his allotted years thanks to this artifact, he dies and immediately becomes a nonplayer-character wraith (as per the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome, page 365). The DM controls this wraith, who never attacks a dragon but always attacks anyone attempting to seize the orb.

Disposition: This orb was discovered centuries ago by a shadow dragon in tunnels beneath the Hellfurnaces, where a Suloise wizard brought it just before the destruction of the empire. The wizard became a lich in time but came into conflict with the shadow dragon and lost. The shadow dragon is of great age and size, with its own personal army of unique undead beings (most created from the bodies of careless drow), and it has hidden the orb near its lair in a lava-filled crevasse. It fully anticipates that someone will come looking for the orb, and it is prepared for this eventuality. At the moment, the orb has no wraith "followers."

Orb of the Elder Wyrm

Intelligence 16, Ego 16; Diameter 9".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon of very old age (800 years) or less; *finger of death* twice per day (no saving throw for dragons); *teleport without error* twice per day; *minor globe of invulnerability* twice per day; *remove curse* by touch once per day; user immune to all will-force spells, as if he had a Wisdom of 22 (see *Player's Handbook*); +2 bonus to all saving throws and Armor Class for everyone within 10' of the orb while it is in use; *detect magic* and *detect traps* at will.

Curses: *Possession*, as above. This orb has some of the worst curses associated with this family of artifacts. To start with, the user must sacrifice a living, sentient being to the spirit in the orb each night in order for the orb to function on the following day. This difficulty came about without the "help" of the agents of the Fiery Kings, as the draconic spirit bound to this orb was so powerful that it adjusted the orb's abilities to suit its dark nature. (Suloise commanders often used

dropped it off at a secret location far to the north, in the Land of Black Ice, just to make sure no one else would get it in the near future. (He never used it against any dragons; he wagered it in a ferocious poker game on another plane and won big.) The arctic location was one of Zagig's special creations, on a level with the "Alice in Wonderland" partial plane described in modules EX1 *Dungeonland* and EX2 *The Land Beyond the Magic Mirror*. The Dungeon Master is encouraged to design an area about 30 miles in diameter with a climate completely different from its arctic surroundings. Possible themes for this setting include a dinosaur-filled "Jurassic Park," Peter Pan's Never Land, or Frank Baum's Oz. Pull out all the stops!

Orb of the Firedrake

Intelligence 14, Ego 14; Diameter 8".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon of old age (600 years) or less; *stone to flesh* (or reverse) twice per day; *dispel magic* four times per day; user is immune to *charm*, *hold*, *suggestion*, and

fear, continuously; +2 bonus to all saving throws and Armor Class for everyone within 10' of the orb while it is in use; *detect magic* at will; *protection vs. normal missiles*, continuously (originally used as protection against humanoid archers).

Curses: *Possession*, as above. Like several other orbs of this type, this one has



civilian criminals or captured spies as fodder for this orb.) Further, the user has a 10% chance each time that its *finger of death* power is used of being slain — irrevocably — along with his victim.

Finally, this orb forms a long-distance magical link to each new user, and it permanently drains one hit point per day from the last being who made use of any of its powers. This hit-point loss continues even if the orb is not used for that day, and the loss cannot be replaced even with the use of *wishes*. The only way to prevent this loss is either to get someone else to become the orb's new user (who will then be drained from that point on) or to take the orb back to its resting place in the Sea of Dust. This resting place is an antimagical room in a buried military building over a half-mile below the surface of this wasteland; it can be reached either by *teleporting* into the air-filled dungeon below the building or by following a dangerous series of tunnels down to the building. The tunnels are inhabited by many of the worst monsters who call the Sea of Dust their home. The spirit in the orb makes this information available if the user asks, as the spirit would prefer to be left alone in its resting place to sleep.

Disposition: The most powerful orb left on Oerth itself, this object has been taken out of the Sea of Dust and returned to it 19 times in 3,000 years, thanks to its curse. Currently, the orb is deep within a natural tunnel complex dug out by monsters who inhabit the Sea of Dust. (The user who was trying to take it back to its resting place was killed on the way.) As powerful as it is, this orb is not at all impossible to obtain — but

once found, it is literally murder to keep. This orb and those of the *hatchling* and *great serpent* are the ones most often seen in the history of the Flanaess.

Orb of the Eternal Grand Dragon

Intelligence 18, Ego 18; Diameter 10".

Powers: *Speak with dragons* at will (as above); *charm* (as above) vs. any dragon of venerable age (1,000 years) or less; limited omniscience once per day (player may ask DM any question related to the campaign; DM may answer fully or in part, but must answer truthfully); *time stop* once per day; *heal* once per day; *disintegrate* once per day; *major globe of invulnerability* twice per day; user immune to all will-force spells, as if he had a Wisdom of 25 (see *Player's Handbook*; *true seeing* four times per day.

Curses: *Possession* (but as a permanent and complete slave of the spirit of the orb, whether the orb is held or not). This effect can be removed only by using a *wish*. Even merely touching this orb causes this *possession* check, making it extremely dangerous.

This orb sustains its powers in part by draining magical potential from the user. Touching this orb causes the user to suffer a -2 penalty on all saving throws. Worse, all other magical items the user has on his person when using this orb must make immediate, individual saving throws vs. disintegration when any power of the orb is used (except for the immunity to will-force spells); failure to save causes the items to lose all magical power, forever. As a minor side effect, the user's skin slowly turns to a bright red over a period of several weeks of using the orb, until he actually glows red in a 5' radius.

It might be assumed that this orb will *charm* dragons older than 1,000 years (wyrms or great wyrms age categories), but it will not. Instead, attempting to use this orb to *charm* such a dragon will cause the user to be automatically *charmed* by the ancient dragon instead, who will understand what is happening and will use the situation to best advantage.

Anyone who uses this orb must make a saving throw vs. spells (with all Wisdom bonuses applicable) at the end of each six hours of cumulative use. Failure to make the save causes the user to change alignment permanently to neutral evil. If the user is already neutral evil, he is struck with a form of insanity akin to megalomania, in which the user thinks he is a deity and attempts to

behave in all ways as one. (This happened to the Suloise commander who called himself the King of the Fiery Kings.)

Disposition: This great orb is no longer even on Oerth. Once meant for use against the Fiery Kings themselves, it became highly unpopular for its devastating curses and was quickly relegated to a heavily guarded storeroom, where no one disturbed it. Agents of Tiamat, the queen of evil dragonkind, managed to remove the orb from the Suloise Empire long before the Rain of Colorless Fire; though warned of the impending theft, Suloise commanders made no attempt to prevent it or to get the orb back.

Tiamat figured that even she might be vulnerable in some way to an artifact this powerful, and this would never do. This orb now rests in a secret region on the first layer of Baator, A.K.A. the Nine Hells, deep in a dark fortress guarded by a small army of red, green, and blue abishai, undead dragon wizard-priests, poisonous reptiles, and killing traps. Tiamat is not particularly concerned that mortal heroes will get the orb, but she is deathly afraid that a tanar'ri prince will do so, and many have already tried. Unknown to Tiamat, the orb has already possessed the abishai commander of the fortress, and he is laying terrible, plane-spanning plans against her.

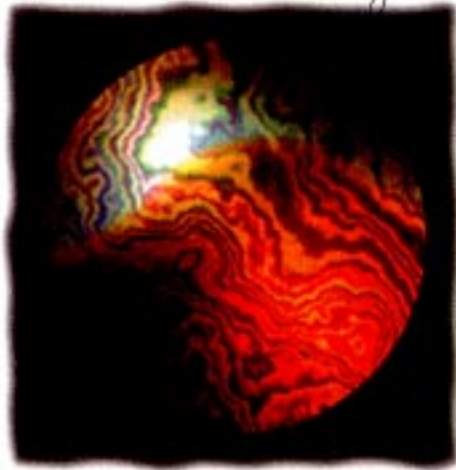
References

The information in this article is based in part on early descriptions of the *orbs of dragonkind* from D&D® Supplement III, *Eldritch Wizardry* (Gary Gygax and Brian Blume, 1976), page 50, and the original Edition AD&D *DMG* (Gary Gygax, 1979), pages 159 and 160. Several artifacts mentioned in these works were given strong connections to the **WORLD OF GREYHAWK®** setting, so the connection was kept for the *orbs of dragonkind* as well. This material is, of course, easily adaptable to any campaign with but a few name changes. Similar magical devices are named and described in *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA™* Volume 2, under "Orb."



Roger E. Moore is a creative analyst at TSR, Inc. Currently working on a variety of projects, he is tickled to have an article in *DRAGON Magazine*. He also wishes to thank Erik Mona for his sharp eye and quick response time in checking over this article.

Orb of the
Eternal Grand Dragon





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DRAGONSLAYERS

The most dangerous game

by Wolfgang Baur

illustrated by Stephen G. Walsh

Most adventurers know that there's more than one way to kill a dragon. This article isn't about any of the dishonorable methods, such as stealth, ambush, poison, and treacherous sorcery. Instead, this survey is about true heroes: those with the courage to stand toe-to-toe with a reptilian nightmare and strike it down. We'll get to the dragonslayer kits in a moment: first, a quick look at the art of dragonslaying itself.

The art of dragonslaying

Many heroes think killing a dragon is the quick and easy road to fame and fortune. With the dragons revamped for the AD&D® 2nd Edition game, this isn't the case: dragons are tougher, smarter, and more dangerous than any other monsters (excluding evil adventurers). The best advice for the would-be dragonslayer is simple: keep your shield ready, protect yourself from its breath as best you can, and if you bring a lot of friends, be prepared to lose some of them.

If you feel compelled to throw a perfectly good hero away, at least use the right tools. The two greatest challenges to the dragonslayer are bringing the beast to ground (a dragon in the air is nigh-unstoppable, especially if it is a spellcasting dragon) and getting through its lair's defenses, which may include servant creatures, traps, and magical wards.

Not everyone tries amateur dragonslaying, or dragonslaying as a group activity. A few hardy souls ride across the land, Quixote-like,

killing the greatest monsters in exchange for large fees, land, expenses, or even simple glory. Among the mythic heroes we all know, Saint George falls into the lone warrior category, as do Siegfried, Beowulf, and many others. Sometimes professional dragonslayers take on a cause to gain a royal bride or simply to keep their skills honed. Isolated and dangerous as their lives are, few approach the prowess of these most finely-honed of warriors.

What are the tricks of the trade? Few dragonslayers share the secrets of their success, but most feel compelled to pass on their knowledge to an apprentice or successor of some kind, someone they trust to carry on the tradition with this knowledge. Even so, a few basic tactics are widely known. For instance, most dragonslayers prefer to fight their foes during poor weather, preferably storms, to minimize the advantage of flight. In addition, dragonslayers never enter a dragon's lair if they can avoid it; fighting on a wyrm's home ground is always more dangerous. Lastly, dragonslayers use weapons and armor especially suited to bringing down large monsters: two-handed swords, great spears, and lances.

The dragonslayer kits presented here come in four varieties: traditional dragonslayers (Fighters), Black Arrows (Rangers), Georgians (Paladins) and Dragon Lords (Wizards and Priests). Thieves are not eligible for any of these kits for the simple reason that they are not concerned with the sort of

honorable combat required of the dragonslayer.



Knightly orders

Members of the Order of the Falling Star in the wizard's kingdom of Bemmea are dedicated to the eradication of monstrous wyrms both within and without the borders of the magocracy, and they have been given the tools to carry it out. In my campaign, only members of the order are eligible to take any of the dragonslayer kits; you must decide what's best for your campaign.

The Order of the Rising Serpent is the Falling Star's great antithesis. It is a knightly and priestly order dedicated to the worship of Ouroboros, the serpent-god. These black knights seek to prevent the death of dragons, considering the wyrms to be avatars of their deity. The Serpent Knights make good secondary villains for dragonslayers, since not every adventure can reasonably involve dragon-slaying. Though the details of the Order are kept well-hidden, in some ways the Order of the Rising Serpent resembles the Cult of the Dragon in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS*® setting. The details of these villains are best developed by the DM.

The Serpents have earned a special place of loathing and contempt in the hearts of the Stars. Members of the Star order who discover a Serpent hiding place are commanded to ride to the nearest stronghold of the Order to raise an army to scourge the Serpents back into the darkness whence they came.

Code of the dragonslayers

The Order of the Falling Star and similar institutions have special codes of behavior governing the manner in which dragons are to be slain. While the particulars may vary, the following four points are central to all such codes.

✦ **Challenge your foe to honorable combat.** Dragonslayers don't skulk around hoping to backstab a dragon.

rituals rouse the dragon's natural curiosity about what manner of creature could possibly be stupid enough to make its presence known to a dragon.)

✦ **Allow no innocent to suffer for your glory.** Never use sentient creatures (or even livestock, in some versions of the code) as bait for dragons — the risk to the innocent is too great. Glory won through the death or suffering of others is no glory at all. Only a clean kill is worthy of immortality in song and story. The aspect of the code distinguishes honorable dragon-slayers from barbarians and scoundrels out for quick glory.

✦ **Accept no quarter.** Dragons are wily, clever talkers; never be drawn into conversation with them. In particular, never believe their stories of being enchanted princes, their claims about their enslavement by evil wizards, or other obvious lies. Even if a dragon begs for mercy or offers years of faithful service, keep fighting. Would a dragon extend you mercy if you asked for it? If so, then it is only to toy with you, as a cat toys with a wounded sparrow.

Dragons that refuse to put up a fight are beneath the notice of a true dragonslayer, who must kill them out of hand. Remember that no dragon is a true pacifist; they are voracious carnivores and often kill merely for sport. Showing mercy to a dragon condemns innocent humans to death. Never forget that dragons will promise anything to save themselves, and then they break their oaths as quickly as they make them.

✦ **Treat a fallen foe with dignity.** Never hack up a dragon's body for meat or trophies. Take a token to prove its death, but don't stoop to its level and desecrate the body. Any foe challenging to a death match is worthy of respect once it is slain.

This nicety does not apply to dragon eggs, which most dragonslayers crush

Dragonslayer

Come not between the dragon and his wrath.

— William Shakespeare
King Lear

Dragonslayers are fanatical enemies of all dragonkind, often as the result of some tragic incident in their past.

Role: The dragonslayer is often a knight errant or a specialized mercenary; he is excellent as a lone NPC who may seek PC help for "the big one."

Secondary Skills: Riding.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* Lance, crossbow, two-handed sword, pike.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Dragon lore.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* Animal trainer, blacksmith, armorer, riding, land-based.

Equipment: Field plate armor, body shield, jousting shield, large warhorse.

Distinctive Appearance: Charred, scarred, and marred.

Special Benefits: Dragonslayers know their foe and gain benefits accordingly. Whenever attacking a dragon with a melee weapon, the dragonslayer's Strength and magical bonuses are doubled for both attack and damage rolls. These benefits apply only to dragons in their true form, not to those who have assumed human or other shape.

Furthermore, their fanaticism makes it possible for dragonslayers to fight their foe on even terms. Dragonslayers can issue a mortal challenge to any dragon simply by bellowing their threats to the sky; the dragonslayer must fight alone for the challenge to work. Magic resistance provides the dragon with no protection; if it fails a saving throw vs. death magic, it must land and engage the dragonslayer on the ground. However, cowardly dragons may still choose to fight their foes on home terrain; a dragon that fails its saving throw against a mortal challenge may still retreat to fight in its lair.

Finally, dragonslayers suffer less damage from dragon's breath weapons, both because they can anticipate the moment when a dragon chooses to use one and because they know the best countermeasures to avoid harm from each one (grounding, wetting clothes, holding one's breath, and so on). On a successful saving throw vs. dragon breath, dragonslayers suffer only one quarter damage. Even a failed result

New Nonweapon Proficiency: Dragon Lore

Wisdom -4

Dragon lore is the body of knowledge required to make hunting dragons alone more than just a suicidal endeavor. With a successful proficiency check, dragon lore allows a PC to evaluate a dragon's tracks, spoor, and shed scales to learn the dragon's age category (plus or minus one category). It also automatically teaches a dragon hunter the basic dragon types, how to distinguish similar-looking subtypes, and the ways to avoid the most common lair traps.

They shout out their defiance for all to hear and thus summon the dragon to combat on the ground. (More cynical minds may believe that these calling-out

out of hand, preventing the creation of another generation of draconic horrors. Ironically, most dragonslayers sincerely hope to work themselves out of a job.

means only one half damage to these warriors.

Special Hindrances: Dragonslayers tend to have short lives, since they are often hunted by dragons whose eggs or young they destroyed. They are sometimes considered soldiers of ill omen, since when they fail, a dragon's wrath often falls on the nearest village or town. They suffer a -2 modifier to all reaction checks because of the air of gloomy, unbending fanaticism that surrounds them.

In addition, a dragonslayer's squire and companions are magically affected by the dragonslayer's aura. If they enter combat with a dragon at the dragonslayer's side, they suffer a -2 penalty to AC for the duration of the combat, as the dragon furiously seeks to knock them aside to concentrate on its primary foe — the dragonslayer. For this reason, most dragonslayers work alone.

A dragonslayer may never attack to subdue nor work with those who do. He is obliged to meet any attempt to do so with force. Showing mercy to a dragon under any circumstances results in the loss of all kit bonuses and makes the former dragonslayer an ordinary fighter again. Good-aligned dragons are no exception to this rule.

Wealth Options: Dragonslayers begin the game with 4d6 (x10) gp, as they are usually supported by a town or patron for their first dragonslaying efforts. They are expected to spend all their money and effort hunting dragons, and any funds not spent on equipment are lost.

Black arrow

"Arrow!" said the Bowman. "Black arrow! I have saved you to the last. You have never failed me, and always I have recovered you."

J.R.R. Tolkien
The Hobbit

The black arrow believes that the best way to kill a dragon is from a distance. He is a master marksman, able to bring a dragon down with a well-placed shot.

Role: These archers wait for a dragon to come within bow-range, then shoot at its most vulnerable point.

Secondary Skills: Bowyer/fletcher.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* One additional slot in any bow. *Recommended:* Specialization in a bow, plus normal proficiency in the Dragonslayer kit's melee weapons.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Bowyer.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* Dragon lore, tracking.

Equipment: Long bow or heavy crossbow.

Distinctive Appearance: Like all rangers, black arrows travel light, typi-

Wealth Options: Black arrows start with 3d6 (x10) gp but automatically begin the game with a special bow of their choice, which allows them to add their Strength bonus to damage to attack rolls.

Saint George

Besides being the patron saint of England, St. George as a historical figure is murky: he may have lived around AD 315 and served as a Cappadocian officer in the Roman army. He became very popular among soldiers during the Middle Ages, though the dragon wasn't added to his story until the 13th century, when the legend of St. George was retold yet again, almost a thousand years after his death. In the early 16th century, Pope Clement VII removed the dragon from the church history, but it lives on in the popular mind.

cally wearing studded leather armor, an open-faced helm, carrying a bow.

Special Benefits: A black arrow can make a called shot against a flying dragon's wing joints, forcing the dragon to glide and land, usually within a mile or two of the battlefield, upon a successful attack. The attack roll is made normally, without the usual called shot penalties, because of the black arrow's knowledge of dragon anatomy and his ability to track the wing during a glide or dive, rather than when the wing is moving. Sometimes, of course, injuring a wing brings an enraged dragon down in a sharp dive directly at the attacker.

Once per day, a black arrow may search for weakness while observing a dragon. If the black arrow passes an Intelligence ability check with a -3 penalty, he finds a weakness in the dragon's armor, some little crack or missing scale where an arrow or crossbow bolt can have maximum effect. If he finds one, all successful hits inflict double damage, including a doubling of his Strength bonus (magical and specialization bonuses are not doubled).

At 9th level, a black arrow can craft one arrow or bolt of dragon-slaying. Each time he gains a level thereafter, he can craft one more such arrow or bolt.

Special Hindrances: Black arrows spend so much time training with missile weapons that they suffer a -1 penalty to all attack rolls with hurled or melee weapons. Also, like most rangers, they rarely wear armor heavier than chain mail, as these interfere with their aim.

In addition, not every dragon has a weak spot. Some elder wyrms are plated literally inches deep in scales, gems, and metal. If the Intelligence check fails, the black arrow must attack normally.

Finally, a black arrow may never attack to subdue a dragon.

Georgians

*St. George he was for England,
And before he killed the dragon
He drunk a pint of English ale
Out of an English flagon.*

— G.K. Chesterton
The Englishman

This paladin kit is for those few who feel called upon to smite the greatest symbols of evil, the chromatic dragons.

Role: To be a shining example of the power of faith over darkness.

Secondary Skills: Groom, armorer.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* Lance, two-handed sword.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Riding, land-based, religion.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* Dragon lore, weather sense, tracking.

Equipment: Lance, heavy warhorse, barding, and the best armor he can afford.

Distinctive Appearance: Georgians are primed for mounted combat. Green leather cloak, metal body shield, halo (optional).

Special Benefits: The most powerful protection that Georgians gain is their double-strength protection from dragons, 10' radius. Dragons suffer a -2 to all attack rolls against the knight and those within the area of effect. In addition, Georgians suffer no damage from the breath weapon of evil dragons.

Furthermore, Georgians can use a dragon call once per month, summoning a dragon to battle. Unless the dragon makes a successful morale check, it must leave its lair and fight the knight. Unlike the effects of a dragonslayer kit's mortal challenge, however, this battle need not be fought on the ground.

A Georgians' special paladin's warhorse is utterly unaffected by dragon

New Spell

Dragon Mastery

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: Wizard 4, Priest 3

Range: 100 yds.

Components V, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 4

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Special

A more powerful and specific version of a *charm monster* spell, *dragon mastery* allows a wizard or priest to enter a magical battle of wills with the affected dragon. The outcome is anything but certain, but the more powerful and charismatic of the two gains power over the lesser.

Dragon mastery affects all true dragons, false dragons, wyrms, linnorms, Oriental dragons, wyverns, drakes, and draconians. The spell requires a single dragon scale (of an age at least equal to the target dragon's) and a silver crucible to burn the scale in. The spell has no effect on non-draconic monsters.

When the spell is cast, both caster and target must make an immediate Charisma check. The caster subtracts his level as a spellcaster from the roll, and the dragon subtracts its age category (half its hit dice for lesser dragons). If the caster rolls lower, he has mastered the dragon and can command it to undertake whatever actions he likes. (Suicidal actions or actions requiring the dragon to disclose the location of its hoard immediately cancel the spell's effect.) If the dragon rolls lower, it has dominated the caster, and can likewise command him.

In both cases, the spell lasts as long as an equivalent charm person spell would last, according to the loser's Intelligence and saving throws. See the description of the charm person spell in the Player's Handbook for more guidelines on saving throws for this spell.

Intelligence	Check Every
3 or less	3 months
4-6	2 months
7-9	1 month
10-12	3 weeks
13-14	2 weeks
15-16	1 week
17	3 days
18	2 days
19 or more	1 day

fear of any kind. In addition, it is usually shielded by its master's protection from dragons ability.

Special Hindrances: Because of their narrow focus, George characters lose the paladin's protection from evil, protection from disease, and detection of evil intent abilities, as well as the ability to turn undead. They are protected only against dragons.

They must abide by all other paladin restrictions, such as tithing and keeping no more than 10 magical items. Because of their special skills, they are rarely asked to undertake missions for their order.

Wealth Options: Like other paladins, the Georgian starts the game with 5d4 (x10) gp.

Dragon lord

"No dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk, and of wasting time trying to understand it."

— J.R.R. Tolkien
The Hobbit

A little like Saint Francis, a little like Ged from Ursula LeGuin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, these magic-using tricksters are the pied pipers of the dragon-slaying world. In fact, though they master dragons, they are more like beastmasters than monster killers; they tame dragons rather than slay them. They are often masters of riddling or rhetoric, able to match a dragon's ability to twist words and hypnotize listeners.

Successful dragon lords often use a dragon they have already tamed to subdue other dragons.

Role: To learn all they can of the art of taming dragons and to find the tools to do it with.

Secondary Skills: None.

Weapon Proficiencies: Normal. No particular weapon is common to the kit.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* Dragon tongue, animal training (dragons). *Recommended:* Dragon lore, riding, airborne, animal handling, language, ancient (Auld Wymish), language, modern (Dragon tongue).

Equipment: Staff, prod, or bridle, extra-large cinch strap.

Distinctive Appearance: Dragon lords never wear any part of a dragon (claws, hide, and so on), but they often decorate some of their equipment (such as staves or maces) with a draconic theme.

Special Benefits: Dragon lords are smooth talkers, usually with a high Charisma and a golden voice. If they can engage a dragon in conversation for

more than a single round, they gain a reaction check with a bonus equal to their level. If the check is "Cautious" or better, the dragon is "Indifferent" instead, attacking only to defend itself. If the check is "Indifferent" or better, the dragon is "Friendly" instead; in some cases, a young dragon may even do a small favor for the dragon lord. Some DMs may prefer to role-play this interaction instead, but keep in mind that dragon lords know how to appeal to a listening dragon. (Give the player a break if he is having trouble getting into the role.)

When fighting to subdue a dragon, dragon lords can use spells to subdue, something not normally possible with offensive magics. They do this by careful, intimidating placement of damaging spells; this form of magical intimidation is not possible for mages who don't dedicate themselves to it.

If the path magic system is used in the campaign (see "Paths of Power," issue #216), dragon lords automatically have access to the Path of the Dragon. If not, their spell selection is typically from the Enchantment/Charm and Illusion/Phantasm schools. Most dragon lords learn *dragon mastery* when they reach an appropriate level (see sidebar).

Special Hindrances: Despite their skill at taming dragons, a dragon lord can never have more than one tame dragon, unless he has tamed a mated pair (dragons are much too territorial ever to share close proximity with a competitor or a member of another draconic subrace). Attempting to keep two dragons soon results in a death match, often with plenty of collateral damage. Such dragons deliberately kept from fighting each other soon waste away, frustrated and enraged by the lack of opportunity to destroy a hated rival.

Dragon lords cannot and do not take treasure from the hoards of those dragons they tame. If they do so, they immediately lose any control they might have established over that beast.

Wealth Options: Like beastmasters, dragon lords are generally poor. They begin with 1d4 (x10) gp.



Wolfgang Baur has finally accepted the sad fact that he's doomed to live the life of Eurotrash. In fact, he revels in it by drinking too much coffee, listening to too much Europop, and complaining too much about the weather in Seattle.

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Dragons in myth and literature

Dragons of Legend

by John D. Rateliff

illustrated by Albrecht Dürer

There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light.

—J.R.R. Tolkien
The Hobbit

No creature is so representative of fantasy as the dragon. The dragon is to fantasy as the vampire is to horror, as the rocket ship is to science fiction, and as the quick-draw sheriff is to the western. There's a reason why the world's most popular fantasy role-playing game has the word "Dragons" in its name. Not the elf, the griffon, the giant, nor the unicorn has such deep resonance in our culture.

Dragons feature prominently in many of the world's great myths: the Sumerian creation goddess Tiamat; the "great red dragon" of Revelations, a seven-headed beast whose coming signals the end of the world; the guardian of the Golden Fleece; the Midgard Serpent encircling the world who rises to help destroy the Norse gods on the day of Ragnarok; or the great serpent Apep, eternal foe of all the Egyptian gods, who seeks to devour the sun. According to legend, the Greek hero Cadmus slew a dragon and sowed its teeth into a field, where they grew into men who helped him found the great city of Thebes. Perseus, another Greek hero, found the princess Andromeda chained to a rock as

tribute to a great sea-monster and rescued her, setting a trend that the heroes, dragons, and captive maidens of a thousand stories have followed ever since.

Belief in dragons was widespread in the Middle Ages. Christendom had Saint George the dragonslayer, a story imported from Asia Minor. The Welsh took the red dragon as their national symbol (hence Merlin's prophecy of the red dragon of the British defeating the white dragon of the Saxons). The Norse had the story of Sigurd Fafnir's-bane, outstanding both for the distinct personality of the wyrm — the first speaking dragon I know of — and the ambush tactics the hero is forced to employ to slay it. Fafnir, a giant who had taken on dragon form (the better to guard his great treasure-hoard), was killed when young Sigurd dug a pit in a path frequented by the dragon and lay in wait for him. The next time the dragon passed that way, Sigurd stabbed him without warning from below, showing that courage and shrewdness ranked higher than fair-play when dealing with such an overwhelming foe. For their part, the English, who took St. George as their patron once they'd settled in Britain and sent the Britons packing, had the legend of Beowulf — a hero so brave and foolhardy that he insisted on taking on the dragon that was ravaging his kingdom in single combat. The importance and sheer ferocity of dragons is shown in that Beowulf, who had handily slain Grendel and Grendel's mother single-handedly, died in his battle with the dragon and would have failed to slay the creature in turn had he not received timely aid from one of his warriors. Even the greatest warrior, according to Norse and Anglo-Saxon legend, could not expect to face a dragon and survive.



“Historical” dragons

How much did the people of the time actually believe in their own stories? The modern fantasy author writes about things he or she does not believe could exist (that’s what makes it a fantasy), but determining whether Shakespeare believed in his witches or Dante in the nine circles of Hell is a far murkier matter. Leslie Kordecki, in her dissertation, *Tradition & Development of the Medieval English Dragon* (University of Toronto, 1980), noted that early medieval stories concerning dragons tended to portray them as living, breathing creatures, whereas later stories often reduced them to mere symbols that vanished in a puff of smoke when banished by a saint. The overall impression garnered from reading the legends — or what survives of them, after centuries of attrition — is that yes, people did believe in them. Or, to put it another way, there was nothing to prove that dragons didn’t exist, and a good deal of evidence that they did or once had.

As C. S. Lewis noted in his wonderful overview of the medieval world view, *The Discarded Image* (1964), medieval people had a great regard for ancient authorities. Much of their culture — science, medicine, theology, philosophy, literature, etc. — was inherited directly from the ancients, the Romans and the Greeks (and, later, the Arabs). Those authorities were unanimous in their belief that dragons had once walked the earth. If there were any doubters, they had only to look in the greatest of all authorities: the Bible itself.

The verse describing the first living creatures in Genesis is translated in modern Bibles as “great sea monsters,” “whales,” or something similar. The Hebrew word in question, *tannin*, can be translated in several ways. The one chosen by St. Jerome, translator of the Vulgate or Latin Bible, was *draco*: dragon. Modern Bibles from the King James ver-

sion onward have shied away from the mythical and have substituted “whale,” “leviathan,” or even “jackal,” but the medieval Latin Bible in use from the fourth century had perhaps a dozen clear references to dragons haunting the wilderness, lurking in the great sea, and generally laying in wait for the unwary like the serpent in the Garden (who himself became a dragon in some popular retellings of the Eden story).¹ Many fantasy authors have made the dragons the first sentient race on his or her world (influenced consciously or unconsciously by the historical fact on our world of dinosaurs, no doubt), little realizing that the most famous creation story agreed with them.

It’s important to note, however, that while the average medieval person certainly believed in the existence of dragons, he also probably thought they had died out long ago. Dragons belonged to the legendary past, the age of wonders, not the cold hard light of their “modern day.” The occasional discovery of dinosaur bones² only provided additional proof, if any were needed beyond the well-attested stories of legendary heroes and saints’ lives, that giants and dragons had once roamed the lands in ancient days.³ Whether any still survived was open to debate: who knew what might lurk in unexplored, far-off corners? In Tolkien’s words, dragons were “comfortably far-off, and therefore legendary,” but he goes on to note that the dragons for their part would hold much the same view of knights:

“So knights are mythical!” said the younger and less experienced dragons. “We always thought so.”

“At least they may be getting rare,” thought the older and wiser worms; ‘far and few and no longer to be feared.’

— J. R. R. Tolkien
Farmer Giles of Ham

Dragons, Reluctant and Otherwise

When modern fantasy began to appear in the mid-19th century, there were plenty of examples in myth, legend, and medieval literature for fantasists to draw from. Considering the wealth of fantasy produced in the last 130 years or so, dragons are actually rather rare, and good (i.e., impressive) dragons even more so. Endless retellings of the legend of St. George need not concern us here; instead, let’s concentrate on some of the more important innovators.

One of the most important stories, widely imitated right down to the present, was Kenneth Grahame’s “The Reluctant Dragon” (1898).⁴ In this simple story of a dragon who prefers the quiet life to all that nasty rampaging, kidnapping-of-princesses, and fighting-with-knights business, Grahame broke the cliché of dragons as mindless, ravening beasts. His dragon prefers to write poetry, and when St. George appears on the scene the dragon staunchly refuses to fight him. The saint, for his part, is spurred on by the townspeople’s lurid fibs of dragon-depravation. “All this evening I’ve been listening . . . to tales of murder, theft, and wrong; rather too highly colored, perhaps, not always quite convincing, but forming in the main a most serious roll of crime.” George is sadly disappointed to learn that the townspeople are betting six-to-four in the dragon’s favor. Eventually the two of them decide on a sham-fight in which George pokes the dragon in a non-vital spot, then the “reformed” monster makes a speech at the victory banquet — the first “subdued” dragon on record. That latter-day imitators of Grahame’s work who preferred sentimentality to adventure eventually created the cliché of “Puff the Magic Dragon” — the dragon as cute and cuddly — is no fault of his. The idea of dragons as intelligent, cultured

1. One of those who does so is Edmund Spenser, in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. Despite the daunting spelling, the climactic battle between George and the dragon at the end of Book I is well worth a DM’s time as probably the best retelling of a classic story.

2. A not-unusual occurrence among the crumbling cliffs of southern England even to this day. As a child, Tolkien found a fossil jaw which he kept as a petrified piece of dragon bone.

3. Thus the Anglo-Saxons ascribed wonders such as paved roads and stone buildings,

neither of which they’d encountered back in the Angle or Saxony, as *orthanc enta geweorc*: the cunning work of giants — now long gone but leaving obvious signs behind them. Interestingly enough, the great 12th-century Welsh author Geoffrey of Monmouth, who spun an amazing web of entertaining stories into his own highly entertaining version of British history (apparently inventing most of the story of King Arthur as he went along), also held that the isle of Britain was occupied by giants before the coming of humans. Both of these might derive from the well-known Biblical reference: “There were giants in the earth in those days” (Genesis 6:4 [KJV]).

4. Originally a chapter in Grahame’s book *Dream Days* (1898), which along with *The Golden Age* (1895) seriously attempted to present childhood as it actually appeared to children; *The Golden Age* in particular is a direct ancestor of Bill Waterson’s *Calvin & Hobbes*. Grahame is best known today as the author of *The Wind in the Willows*.

5. Roger Zelazny wrote a very good short story, “The George Business,” which, as with Grahame’s story, retells the St. George and the Dragon story with an amusingly jaded modern perspective.

creatures with whom one could bargain for mutual gain was a gift well worth the price.⁵

The next great dragon-story is Lord Dunsany's "The Fortress Unvanquishable, Save for Sacnoth" (1908) — one of the great epic fantasy adventures of all time. In one 20-page short story, Dunsany launched the "sword and sorcery" genre, sending his hero, Leothric, on a quest against an evil sorcerer and all his minions: giant spiders, vampires, succubi, hordes of armed guards, the sword-wielding sorcerer himself, and not one, not two, but *three* guardian dragons. Best of all, however, is the preliminary adventure young Leothric undertakes to gain the sword whereby the sorcerer's defenses can be defeated. Unfortunately, the unhappy hero learns that the sword currently forms the spine of the great dragon-crocodile Tharagaverug, and that Tharagaverug is invulnerable except for one weakness: the only way in which he can die is of starvation. Leothric must fight the dragon for three days and nights until the beast finally starves to death, keeping out of reach of its great maw the whole time. Once he has the sword, the rest is easy — merely a matter of resisting temptation and using his wits — but imagine the average PC's reaction at being told he must fight a near-invulnerable dragon one-on-one until it starves!

Dunsany also wrote of other dragons, usually lampooning old clichés, as in "Miss Cubbidge and the Dragon of Romance" (1912), where he substituted a politician's daughter for the traditional princess and suggested that being abducted did her some good. "The Hoard of the Gibbelins" (also 1912), one of his best stories, offers a fine example of how he plays on the clichés at the same time that he subverts them, constantly playing with readers' expectations regarding wicked dragons and noble fairy-tale knights:

[T]here was a dragon . . . who if peasants' prayers are heeded deserved to die, not alone because of the number of maidens he cruelly slew, but because he was bad for the crops; he ravaged the very land and was the bane of a dukedom. . . . So [Alderic] took horse and spear and pricked till he met the dragon, and the dragon came out against him breathing

bitter smoke. And to him Alderic shouted, "Hath foul dragon ever slain true knight?" And well the dragon knew that this had never been, and he hung his head and was silent, for he was glutted with blood. "Then," said the knight, "if thou would'st ever taste maidens blood again thou shalt be my trusty steed, and if not, by this spear there shall befall thee all that the troubadours tell of the dooms of thy breed.

And the dragon did not open his ravening mouth, nor rush upon the knight, breathing out fire; for well he knew the fate of those that did these things, but he consented to the terms imposed, and swore to the knight to become his trusty steed.

— Lord Dunsany
"The Hoard of the Gibbelins"
from *The Book of Wonder*

Tolkien's dragons

J.R.R. Tolkien's contributions to fantasy in general and dragon-lore in particular are so great as to place him in a league of his own. The whole concept of the PC party (specialists of different backgrounds working together toward a common goal) derives from Tolkien's "Fellowship of the Rings," while his own particular "take" on all the major fantasy races — elves, dwarves, goblins, etc. — have become the common currency for a whole generation of successors. He is the most imitated fantasist of all time, and his masterly portrayal of Smaug, "the chiefest and greatest of all calamities," is the standard by which all other fantasy dragons should be judged.

Whereas after Grahame the tendency had been to treat dragons as witty and cute, Tolkien restored the sense of them as deadly predators. All of Tolkien's dragons — Smaug from *The Hobbit*, Glorund from *The Silmarillion*, the wily but not over-bold Chrystophrax Dives from *Farmer Giles of Ham* — are clever, unscrupulous, greedy, and exceedingly dangerous. They can be bargained with, but each is capable of wiping out a small army or good-sized town all by himself. Anyone who dares to talk with one of Tolkien's dragons had better have an escape route planned if he does not want to become the creature's next meal.

Furthermore, Tolkien's dragons delight in mischief: rather than kill Turin, a brave but rash and not overly clever

hero, Glorund convinces him to abandon the people who rely upon him and sends him on a fool's errand, while Smaug sows the seeds of doubt in Bilbo's mind that shortly afterward help wreck his friendship with the dwarves. People who listen to dragons are apt to fall under their enchantment ("Smaug had rather an overwhelming personality"), and any spark of greed inside them usually fares into full life. Sometimes this dragon-greed is even contagious, transmitted by contact with treasure "over whom a dragon has long brooded" — as shown in the fate of Thorin Oakenshield and to a lesser extent that of Bilbo himself (whose secret theft of the Arkenstone was a thoroughly uncharacteristic act). Similarly, Fafnir's treasure, the hoard of the Niebelungs, seems to bring disaster to all who possess or even lay claim to it, while Beowulf's grieving countrymen wisely decline to take any of the dragon's hoard after his death, instead placing it all on his pyre and burying what remains in his barrow.

Finally, Tolkien's dragons are hard to kill. Smaug destroys Dale and the Kingdom Under the Mountain, sweeping aside all resistance, and that was when he was, in his own words, "young and tender." Later in the book we're given a vivid description of his attack on the mountainside and burning of Lake-Town. Had he not been slain by Bard's expert shot with a special arrow to his one secret vulnerable spot, Tolkien speculated that Sauron might have later manipulated him into destroying Rivendell.⁶ Likewise, Glorund destroys the elven city of Nargothrond, effortlessly scattering and destroying its battle-tried elven warriors, while other dragons help plunder the great hidden city of Gondolin. For his part, Chrystophrax shows great reluctance to melee with anyone armed with a sword of dragon-slaying like Giles' Claudimorax (and no wonder), but when faced with the possibility of losing his whole hoard handily massacres the Little Kingdom's assembled knighthood, then later effortlessly puts a second army to flight. It's possible to slay one of the Great Worms, but only by careful planning and good luck.

Modern dragons

After Tolkien, dragons once again became part-and-parcel of mainstream

6. *Unfinished Tales* (1980), "The Quest of Erebor," contains a behind-the-scenes look at the opening chapter of *The Hobbit* from

Candalf's point of view, telling us how the events appeared to the wizard and the dwarves. In addition to offering an amusing

contrast to Bilbo's narrative, this bit of "alternate Hobbit" lets us learn more about Gandalf's motives and plans.

fantasy. Anne McCaffrey used them to give a fantasy flavor to what are essentially science fiction romance novels. Ursula Le Guin broke with the Tolkien tradition by basing Earthsea's dragons on Oriental rather than European myth. Hickman and Weis's *DRAGONLANCE®* Chronicles picked up on various hints of the massive destructiveness of solitary individual dragons and showed how dragons *en masse* could ravage an entire continent. Patricia Wrede's *Talking to Dragons* (1985) updated fairy-tale motifs to offer an amusing account of the extreme importance of good manners and a firm grasp of dragon etiquette when dealing with such powerful beings. Gordon R. Dickson made the hero of his novel *The Dragon and the George* (1976) a human whose mind is transferred into a dragon's body who then has to come to terms with his new body's powers and limitations. The list could go on and on. The permutations in today's fantasy are endless: from vast inhuman engines of destruction to cuddly little cat-sized pets, dragons are everywhere.

Three particularly interesting dragons, all from fantasies published in the last 25 years, deserve closer attention. Gyld the Dragon, from Patricia A. McKillip's *The Forgotten Beast of Eld* (1974), is an old, old dragon who desires only to sleep on his hoard; his gold literally means more than his life to him, yet when roused this ancient creature scatters armies, sinks ships, and keeps an armed garrison cowering behind their city walls in terror. The extreme old age of the very powerful wyrm has rarely, if ever been more vividly portrayed. The lesson from *Beowulf*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Forgotten Beast of Eld* all agree: Let sleeping dragons lie.

At the opposite extreme, Wrede's *Talking to Dragons* (the first, and much the best, of a four-book series) features a baby dragon, so young that it has not chosen a name or even its sex yet. Wrede also offers us a glimpse of dragon politics, the young dragon's grandmother being the King of Dragons (the title being invariable no matter who's currently doing the job). Any DM whose PCs have acquired a dragon egg and want to raise their hatchling as pet, familiar, or companion, would find Wrede's book a valuable resource as well as a good read. Perhaps even more intriguing is Wrede's revelation of why dragons want princesses in the first place (a subject dealt with in more detail

in the later books in the series, which are actually prequels to the first book):

Just at that moment, the Princess opened her eyes. She gave a small scream, and the dragon frowned.

"You don't have to be frightened," if said. "Really. You're my Princess now, and I'm going to take proper care of you, and you can clean my scales and cook for me. I believe that's the standard arrangement."

— Patricia C. Wrede
Talking to Dragons

Not all dragons appear in dragon-form, and by far the best anthropomorphic dragon in modern fantasy appears in R.A. MacAvoy's *Tea with the Black Dragon* (1983). When we first meet him, Mayland Long is permanently stuck in human form, and his slow integration into the modern human world and coping with his new, unfamiliar body make fascinating reading. Mr. Long may appear human, but his mind remains that of a thousand-year-old dragon, giving him a unique outlook. Better yet, he reappears in dragon form in one of MacAvoy's other novels, *Raphael* (1984) — set some five or six centuries earlier — giving MacAvoy a chance to describe his natural form, with all its elegance, intelligence, and ferocity. The dragons of these three writers, each so different in their styles, all have so much personality that they give an idea of what a creative DM can do in the way of characterization.

Dragonslayers

"[T]hey all began discussing dragon-slayings historical, dubious, and mythical, and the various sorts of stabs and jabs and undercuts, and the different arts devices and stratagems by which they had been accomplished. The general opinion was that catching a dragon napping was not as easy as it sounded, and the attempt to stick one or prod one asleep was more likely to end in disaster than a bold frontal attack."

— J. R. R. Tolkien
The Hobbit

For those of a practical turn of mind who expect that their next encounter with a dragon is likely to be in a role-playing game, with said dragon charging down upon their characters bent on death and destruction, a final word about dragon-slaying. Fantasy fiction is full of epic battles between hero or heroine and dragon, but there's considerable

disagreement over how best to go about it. The classic "St. George" approach is to get the beast so mad that it rushes blindly at you, obligingly exposing its only vulnerable part, the inside of the throat, and letting you stick your lance down it. Tolkien maintained that it wasn't as easy as all that, and that killing a dragon required learning its most vulnerable spot (usually underneath): Glorund, like Fafnir, was slain by a hero lying in ambush who stabbed the dragon from below as it passed over his hiding place. Kenneth Morris, in the wonderful Welsh fantasy *The Book of Three Dragons* (1930), includes a scene where the hero and a dragon go at it with such gusto that they rip up boulders and whale on each other with them, tossing them back and forth. Le Guin's Ged simply cast a spell that caused the dragons to drop helpless into the sea and drown — an effective method, but one lacking drama and a certain sense of fair-play. We've already discussed Dunsany's ingenious approach (starve the creature, if only you can stay alive long enough). The less scrupulous will find a foolproof scheme in Will Shetterly's *Cats Have No Lord* (1985), but one that requires an expendable fool to implement (can you say "NPC"?). Perhaps the best approach of all is that followed by Tolkien's common-sense Farmer Giles: don't fight if you can possibly avoid it, and break off to negotiate at the first reasonable opportunity.

After all, with a lifespan of several centuries, why shouldn't a dragon be willing to give up its treasure now and hunt down the thief a half-century or so later?



John D. Ratcliff earned his doctoral degree with a dissertation on the works of Lord Dunsany. He leads a fantasy reading group known as the Burrahobbits and plays a mean halfling in AD&D® game sessions.

Trivia Question:

Other than the infamous Lord Soth of Sithicus, what dark lord of the RAVENLOFT® setting came originally from Krynn, world of the DRAGONLANCE® campaign?

Answer: Vlad Dracul of Polovnia

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Elementals of Air and Water



Fire in the Five Peaks

by Ed Stark

illustrated by David O. Miller

Few and far between are the dragons of Cerilia, the setting of the AD&D® BIRTHRIGHT® campaign. Solitary and immensely powerful, they still hide from the younger races of the continent. (No more than six exist in the fabled Drachenaur Mountains, the legendary home of dragons.) Even the life of the youngest of these dragons spans millennia. No dwarf, halfling, or human remembers when one of these creatures cracked its shell, and the immortal elves heard the last rumors of hatchlings over 500 years ago.

The youngest known dragon of Cerilia made a name for himself in northern Anuire. His is called Zakhur, which means "Guardian" in the old tongue. By far the youngest and most vibrant of the known dragons, his birth predates the Anuirean Empire itself, and he survived its fall.

But even Zakhur did not hatch into this world before the Battle of Mount Deismaar, some 1,500 years ago. His mother, Weyrzak, laid his egg in the Stonecrown Mountains nearly 17 centuries ago. (Dragon eggs rest long before they hatch, though some magic must have kept Zakhur in his shell for centuries beyond his time.)

Those who remember the tales of Weyrzak remember her most for her part in the legendary Battle of Mount Deismaar. Azrai, god of evil and darkness, fooled the elves, ignored the dwarves, and corrupted the Vos, but he bargained with the dragons. None know now what the god of Shadow offered those creatures in return for their aid, but few flocked to his banner. Those that did, however, wreaked havoc on Azrai's enemies. They protected his undead legions and shadow warriors from the priestly magic of the armies of light, and they thrice drove back the vanguard of Haelyn and Anduiras.

The land quaked with the dragons' tread, and the very air caught flame in their passing. The armies of Anduiras, the great tower ships of Brenna, and the hunters of Reynir withered before their breath. The dragons' leader, a great stone-drake of Aduria named Nargest ("Iceblood" in ancient Anuirean), personally destroyed a small mountain where Sera's White Knights had held the line

against the undead for nearly two days.

Some say Weyrzak the Thunderer felt the destruction of the mountain, while others believe Ruornil, Vorynn's champion, summoned her with a powerful binding spell. Whatever the truth, Weyrzak furiously swept out of the north and engaged Nargest in a battle that lives in legend today.

When Nargest fell, his flesh burned away from his bones, and the flaming skeleton disappeared into a great crevice beyond the battlefield. Mount Deismaar trembled, and more earthquakes shook the region as the gods prepared to unleash their full might against Azrai.

The death of the old gods and the creation of the new is still a tale told many times from countless perspectives. The blooded survived somehow, and the new gods guided them back to their homes. But nothing protected Weyrzak from the cataclysm, and she found herself caught in the waves of destruction that obliterated the land-bridge between Aduria and Cerilia.

Wounded and dying, Weyrzak made her way toward the Stonecrown Mountains and her solitary egg. Her body swelled with the power of the gods but could not contain it. Like a cancer, the power devoured her from the inside. When she crash-landed deep in the Aelvinwode, she felt her life ebbing.

The pitiable yet terrifying cry of Weyrzak to her infant son still echoes through the forest of the Aelvinwode. Some name it the Call of Weyrzak, while others call it the Lament of Zakhur, and great songs have been sung about it. In answer to the dreadful wail, Zakhur, imprisoned for too long in his egg, burst forth. The power of the cataclysm streamed from his mother's call, infusing the infant with great energy and causing him to grow at amazing speed.

Still only a hatchling, Zakhur could not fly. He crawled, nearly blind, toward the anguished call. The first sound he ever heard was the death-scream of his mother, and some say it aged his heart far beyond his infant body. What terrors were instilled in his mind then, none can know.



Zakhur eventually found his mother, but her body had been transformed. Legend tells that the goddess Nesirie, newly brought to divinity, heard Weyrzak's scream and tried to help the wyrm, remembering her deeds at the great battle. Nesirie could not heal the dragon, so she asked Ruornil and Erik to ease Weyrzak's pain — and so they did, transforming her into the Five Peaks of the Aelvinwode.

When Zakhur found his mother, her pain was gone, but her body was changed. The northeasternmost of the Five Peaks grew over her head, and the last of the pinnacles, set alone in the west, covers the tip of her tail, thrust upward in the pain of death.

The young dragon took his name then, when he vowed to guard the resting-place of his mother. Slowly and painstakingly, he moved Weyrzak's great hoard to the bosom of the Five Peaks, hid it, and rested upon it. When he hunted, he watched ever from afar, driving away the elves, orogs, or men who came too close to the treasury.

Over the centuries, Zakhur the Guardian — also known as Lifesbane, for the number of inquisitive creatures he has sent to their screaming deaths — has jealously guarded the Five Peaks. Many creatures live within the shadows of his mountains, and some even dwell within the Peaks themselves — but none dare trespass on the interior of the mountains, and the Hoard of Weyrzak remains legendary.

Little is known of Zakhur in the intervening years, since he keeps to his home and allows few dwellers within. Many peoples and creatures inhabit the Five Peaks realm now, particularly the Eyeless One, said to control all the *mebhaighl* (magical energy) of the realm. If this is true, the wizard might be mining the source magic of Weyrzak herself.

It has been speculated that Zakhur allows the wizard, as well as the tribes of goblins and orogs, flights of griffons, and solitary trolls to dwell in and around the Five Peaks because they, too, remain territorial. They keep the Rjurik and Anuirean peoples from civilizing the area, and they discourage elves from delving into the mysteries surrounding Zakhur and Weyrzak too deeply. Some say Zakhur actually controls several of these creatures using strange magics and powers he learned from the spirit of his mother.

The spirit of Weyrzak

Most bards and storytellers agree that Weyrzak, aided by the gods, did not really die but entered a sleep of death from which there can be no awakening. However, in her dreams she can be contacted by her son, whom she linked to herself psychically when she imbued him with her last life-energy.

Zakhur learned much magical knowledge from the spirit of his mother, and even as he protects her resting place, Weyrzak guides and protects Zakhur from harm. She taught him not to be enraged or manipulated by mortal powers, and she advises him on matters he might otherwise not understand. Zakhur has grown wise from her teachings, though he has learned little from outside sources.

The Heart of the Mountain

Many adventurers believe Zakhur Lifesbane guards more than just ancient treasure and his mother's bones. They claim he guards a greater prize. They call it the Heart of Weyrzak, the Soul of the Dragon, and the Heart of the Mountain.

Rumored to be a gem the size of a man's head, the Heart of the Mountain holds the ancient soul of Weyrzak. Lying somewhere in the middle three of the Five Peaks, it rests apart from the dragon's hoard, in a great cavern lined with white and brown stone — perhaps the bones and body of Weyrzak herself, or maybe just a mineral phenomenon.

Zakhur watches over the Heart, as does the spirit of Weyrzak herself. But both might be caught sleeping. The spirit of Weyrzak awakens less and less frequently as the centuries go on, and Zakhur sleeps for years on the bed of treasure that lies elsewhere in the mountains. Still, his link to his mother would warn him if any were to disturb the gem — or so legend tells — and few adventurers could survive his wrath if he caught them violating his mother's heart.

Should a miracle occur and a person come into contact with the gem, he might gain the following abilities:

❖ **Knowledge of all wizard spells.** Weyrzak was a mighty spellcaster. Before the magic changed, she knew every wizard spell ever created. Her knowledge has changed with the times — perhaps as the Eyeless One mines her *mebhaighl*, she mines his knowledge right back. A wizard holding the Heart

has no need of a spellbook, though he must still spend time memorizing the spells Weyrzak teaches him.

❖ **Accumulated knowledge.** Weyrzak was old and wise when she died, and her memories lie within the gem. Using her link with Zakhur, she has learned much more over the years. When holding the Heart, one may ask her questions — no more than three times a day, unless the subject is something that might interest Weyrzak — and receive answers. The answers are usually truthful and helpful; Weyrzak has been at peace for centuries and does not begrudge a mortal her knowledge.

❖ **Magic resistance.** The Heart protected Zakhur from magical harm before he could do so himself. Now, it passes its magical resistance on to a wielder. If Weyrzak is contacted, she might be persuaded to protect the bearer of the Heart with a portion of her magic resistance. Too much energy would kill a mortal, however, so the Heart provides only a 5% magic resistance per level of the wielder to a maximum of 50%.

❖ **Monster control.** Three times per day, the bearer can cast *charm monster* at twice his normal level of ability, regardless of whether he could normally cast the spell. Weyrzak's mental and magical power, channeled through a host, allows this power to take effect.

The Heart of the Mountain may have other powers as well. It cannot be destroyed by any known means, and its value simply as a gemstone is utterly incalculable.

Weyrzak's Heart bears at least one curse, however, and perhaps two. The first should be obvious. Zakhur Lifesbane will demonstrate the truth to both his names if anyone steals the gem or even touches it. The dragon will go on a rampage, burning and killing anyone in his way until he retrieves the gem or is destroyed. His link to his mother's spirit guides him in the direction of the Heart unerringly, and he will not rest until it is returned to him.

The second curse may or may not be legendary. Once Weyrzak's Heart leaves the Five Peaks, the spirit within might grow restless. It could desire a body of its own again, and it might settle for a mortal form. Every time the wielder of the Heart of the Mountain uses it outside the Five Peaks realm, check to see if Weyrzak's spirit attempts to take over his body. There is a cumulative 1% chance



of this happening per use of any of the Heart's powers. If Zakhur Lifesbane has somehow been killed, add a base 30% chance to the takeover happening.

Should the DM roll the necessary percentage for Weyrzak to take over a mortal body, she does so automatically — nothing can save a human, dwarf, halfling, or other creature from its possession. Even the “immortal” elves submit immediately to Weyrzak's control. True awnsheghlien or ehrsheghlien might survive. They can make saving throws vs. paralysis (at -8) to resist possession, but Weyrzak never gives up after the first attempt. Every time the Heart is used thereafter, the same saving throw must be made, or the Thunderer possesses the wielder.

If Weyrzak possesses a body, it begins to age quickly — at a rate of one year per week. Unless the dragon can somehow be expelled or convinced to leave, the mortal shell burns out (even elves won't be able to stand this withering forever; most would die after about a year) and Weyrzak's spirit returns to the gem. Some say this has already hap-

pened a few times over the centuries, but no one knows for certain except Weyrzak and Zakhur.

Using Zakhur Lifesbane in a BIRTHRIGHT campaign

Engaging a wyrm such as Zakhur Lifesbane in battle would be probably the most foolish thing an adventuring party could do — but it could happen. Exploring the Five Peaks in search of the Hoard of Weyrzak or the Heart of the Mountain would certainly be nearly as foolish — but, again, stranger things have happened. While Zakhur's power and influence within the Peaks are legendary, they cannot be as complete as tales say, or no word of the creature would ever leak out to the rest of the world.

Some say the Hoard of Weyrzak does not lie in one cavern. Small hoards rest stashed among the Five Peaks, and some have been found by the goblins and orogs that dwell there. True, most have paid the ultimate price for their foolishness (along with their tribes and their neighbors), but some ancient

magic and coins have slipped out to the world. After all, Zakhur cannot be in every cavern at once.

Every so often, Zakhur Lifesbane goes on a rampage. Many tales tell of heroes adventurous enough to quest for Weyrzak's Hoard and succeeding, causing the Guardian to fly out for vengeance. If this is true, then a regent might find his domain beset by the great wyrm — all because of a hero too greedy for his own good, who plundered the hoard and passed through the kingdom. Preventing Zakhur from laying waste to an entire realm could prove a mighty campaign motivator, and finding the treasure to return it to the beast's hoard would be the most logical solution.



A TSR staff designer, Ed Stark designs products for the BIRTHRIGHT line and writes occasionally for DRAGON® Magazine. He finds himself easily distracted by new games, chat about baseball, and bright, shiny objects.

Zakhur Lifesbane, the Guardian

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: The Five Peaks
FREQUENCY: Unique
ORGANIZATION: Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Any
DIET: Special
INTELLIGENCE: Genius (17)
TREASURE: Hx5
ALIGNMENT: Lawful Neutral

NO. APPEARING: 1
ARMOR CLASS: -5
MOVEMENT: 9, Fly 30 (B)
HIT DICE: 20 (142 hp)
THACO: 1
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3 or special
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1d12+10/1d12+10/2d12+10
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Breath weapon, spells, dive
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Fear aura, gaze, spells, invulnerability
MAGIC RESISTANCE: 50% or special
SIZE: G (90' long)
MORALE: Fearless (20) at home; Champion (15) away
XP VALUE: 28,000

S: 25 D: 14 C: 21 I: 17 W: 15 Ch: 16

Gray with gold flecks, smooth scales cover Zakhur Lifesbane's serpentine body. Protected by sharp layers of decorative hide, his face and belly resist the puny attacks of mere mortals. Fully grown, this dragon would make a match for the hardiest of Cerilia's dying breed. Zakhur attacks using his foreclaws and bite, or he can execute any of the special attacks described in the "Dragon" entry of the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ tome.

Combat: Zakhur's breath weapon may be the basis for the flaming death that fills the stories of so many dragon-tales. Lifesbane's fiery breath can still be seen on occasion, lighting up the deep passages between the mountains when the dragon hunts. Zakhur can use his fiery breath once every six rounds, immolating anything within a 50' long cone that extends at its widest point to 30'. It inflicts 20d6+20 hp damage on anything in the cone, though victims may attempt to save for

half damage. Nonmagical and magical objects alike must save vs. magical fire or be burned, melted, or disintegrated.

When hunting, Zakhur uses his gaze attack to freeze opponents (save vs. paralyzation at -4 or be paralyzed with terror for 1d3 turns), then he kills and consumes them at his leisure. Just like other great wyrms, however, Zakhur can spend an entire round exerting his will against a victim caught in his gaze and use the powers of *geas*, *suggestion*, or *feeblemind* on his foe with no saving throw allowed.

If Zakhur engages in combat, all enemies within 50' must save vs. a *fear* spell (as described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, with a -4 to the roll). Zakhur has learned to mask this ability, however, on those rare occasions that he does not want to kill his opponents — though even the bravest hero may feel his knees knock at the sight of the great wyrm.

Because of his great scales and the energies imbued upon him by his mother, Zakhur Lifesbane can ignore a portion of the damage he suffers. Any damage die that rolls a natural "1" against him is ignored, regardless of modifiers or spell effects.

Zakhur shares another great ability with his Cerilian cousins. He can cast wizard spells at the 16th level of ability (or 18th when he actually holds the Heart of the Mountain and uses his mother's energies). Zakhur, however, uses this power only on rare occasions — his mother has taught him to be discrete with his magical energies, lest he anger the gods that have blessed her with peace. Victims of Zakhur's magic suffer -2 modifiers to their saving throws (or -4 if he holds the Heart). Zakhur knows many spells unknown to human or other spellcasters of Cerilia.

Ecology: More lively than most dragons, Zakhur seldom sleeps for more than a dozen years at a time, and then only lightly. He sees his entire purpose in life as protecting the Five Peaks (the mountains, not the realm) and subjugating or destroying intruders. Zakhur may be approached by stout heroes seeking wisdom — though he must be contacted carefully. Actually seeking out his lair could be disastrous. Like most dragons, Zakhur loves treasure (and has accumulated quite a bit to add to his mother's legendary hoard over the years), but he will not forgo his personal mission just to acquire more.





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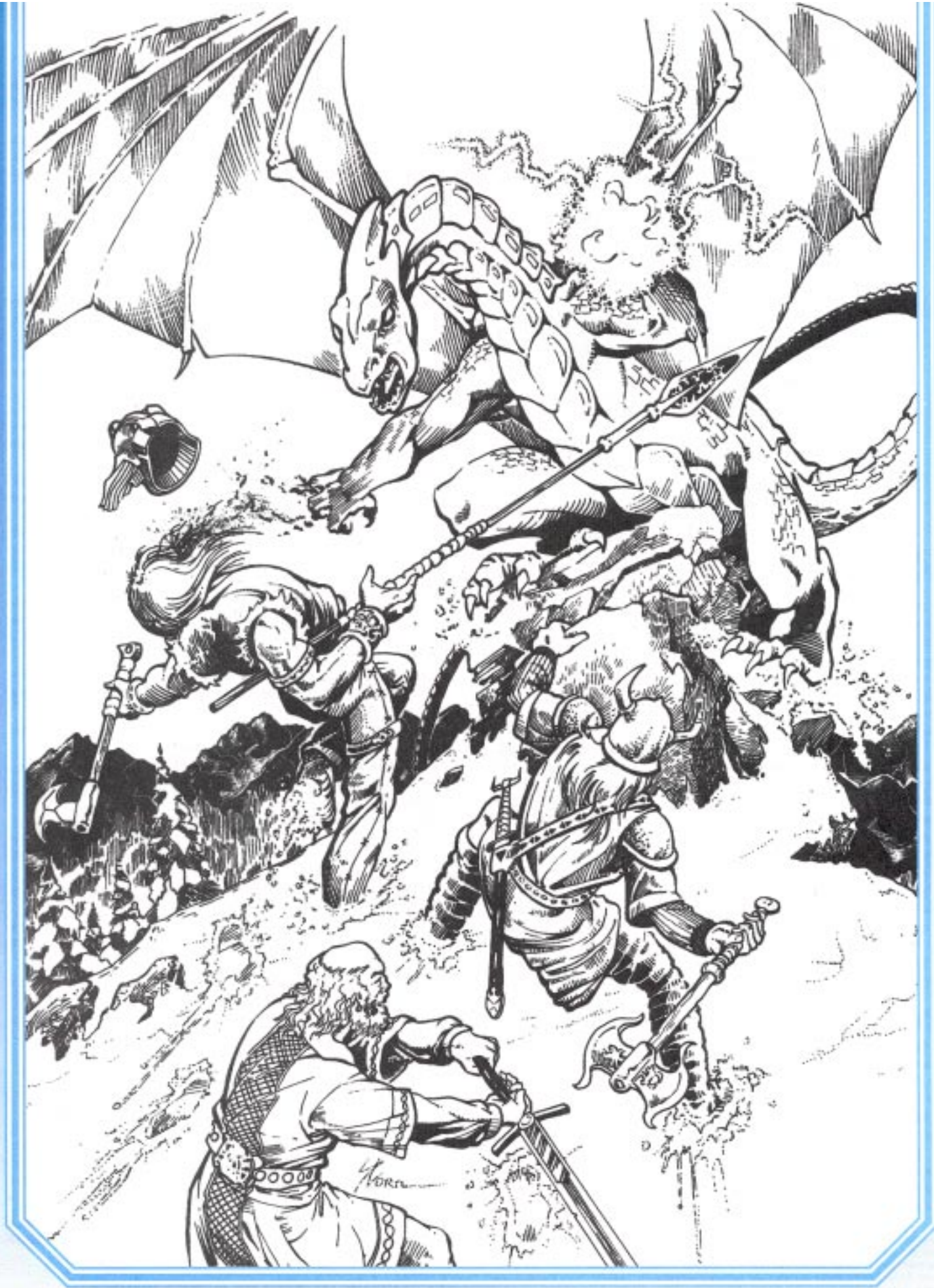
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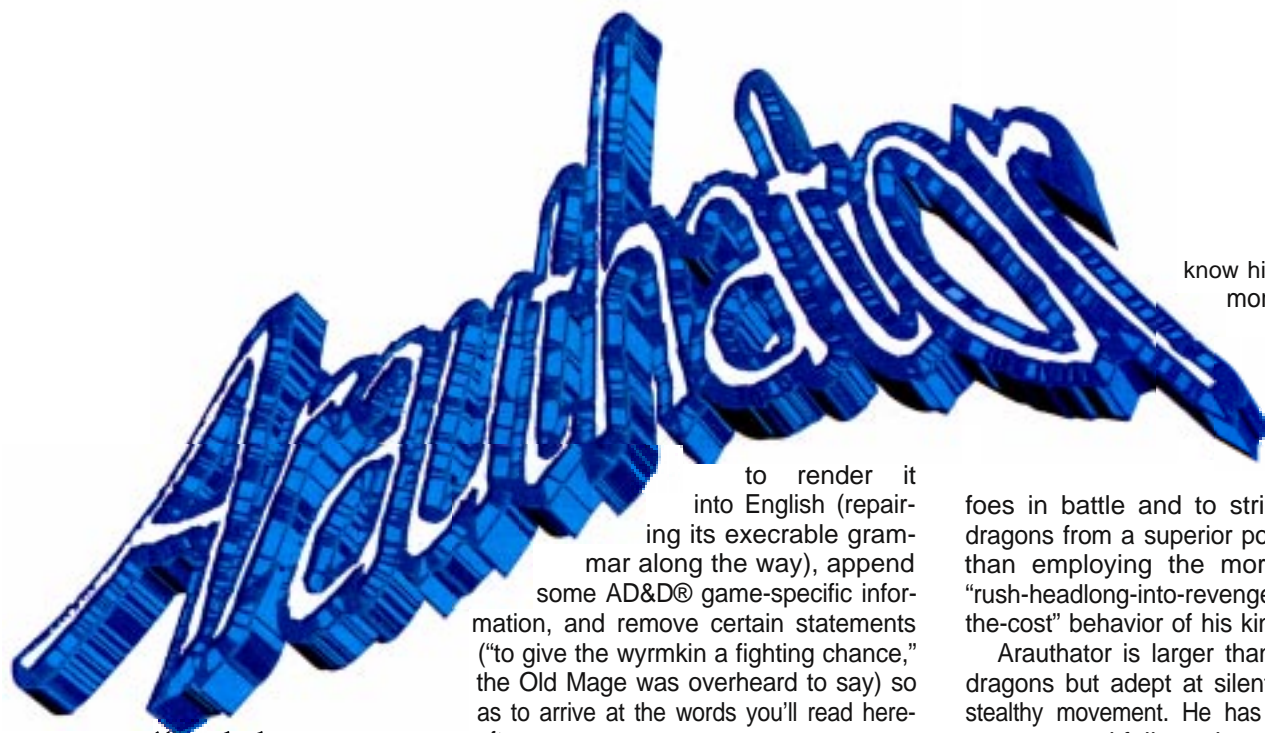
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know him, is clearly more intelligent than most white dragons. He uses traps and spells to hamper

to render it into English (repairing its execrable grammar along the way), append some AD&D® game-specific information, and remove certain statements ("to give the wyrmlin a fighting chance," the Old Mage was overheard to say) so as to arrive at the words you'll read hereafter.

Adventurers take note: Volo's work didn't list all active dragons of the North, only those who've risen to hold a territory known and respected by other dragons. Dracoliches and dead wyrms, however famous, were omitted. Otherwise, Volo would've been old indeed before his wagon-sized chapbook saw print — and any issue of *DRAGON® Magazine* reprinting a respectable portion of it would fill a man-length bookshelf all by itself!

Alphabetically, the first great dragon of the present-day North is Arauthator, "the icy claws that wait at the cold end of the world."¹

This old white dragon is famous for his great size and savagery. For almost a century he has defended his dominion against many ambitious dragons, slaughtering over a score of his own offspring in the process. "Old White Death," as the miners and foresters of the North

foes in battle and to strike intruding dragons from a superior position, rather than employing the more prevalent "rush-headlong-into-revenge-whatever-the-cost" behavior of his kind.

Arauthator is larger than most white dragons but adept at silent gliding and stealthy movement. He has been known to cause rockfalls and even to tear up and drop boulders — not just on the heads of intruding orcs or humans, but also to create barriers to seal up rothé and other large alpine beasts inside mountain valleys, so that he can dine upon them at leisure.

Old White Death is known to patrol his domain tirelessly, keeping careful watch over even the most minor changes. He adjusts his own habits to avoid both the traps of foes and the careless overfeeding that might lead to the disappearance of a species on which he likes to dine. In the process, he has smashed at least one community of frost giants (Bulindiful, a cavern-catacomb fortress set in the heart of Mount Halaragh, just west of the mines of Mirabar in the Spine of the World mountain range), and torn apart a mountain peak (Sardin's Sword, once a lookout over the upper Surbrin) to destroy the bugbear hold inside it.

"Old White Death"

by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

Through the efforts of the intrepid explorer Volothamp Geddarm (more widely known across Faerûn, perhaps, as "that serpent-spitting rogue Volo!"), an incomplete but nonetheless useful survey of currently active dragon rulers in the Sword Coast North region has been compiled, printed, and energetically sold in chapbook form on the streets of Waterdeep, Neverwinter, and Silverymoon. One copy fell into the hands of Elminster of Shadowdale, and after many a snort and head-shaking over it, he was persuaded

1. As he was described by the sage Myrindas of Port Kir, in *Dragons Ye Should Know* (1354 DR).

Arauthator is far more cunning and patient than most white dragons. "The spark of revenge still kindles the fire that warms his heart to carry him on through the centuries," wrote the sage Amorthas of Ruathym,² "but he lets it smolder under dampers of patience and cold calculation, where other whitewings [white dragons] "would leap to the attack." No one knows why Arauthator is this way, but it's clear that the old dragon uses this patience to anticipate and prepare for attacks from rival dragons, rising orc hordes, and the remorhaz who roam the Endless Ice Sea. He also bides his time to develop new personal-warning spells that alert him of approaching dragons and magic items.

Arauthator is a skilled mimic and can speak the common tongue well enough to pose as a lost miner or injured prospector. He has long practice in concealing himself under snow by flapping his wings as he burrows into drifts so as to lift the snow, which then falls over him again in a pristine blanket. Arauthator often dozes when sleeping in snow, but he never sleeps through the approach of danger (he can smell most beasts, including humans, for a mile or more downwind). He has mastered the patience needed to remain still for days on end, perched on a mountainside or lying in the snow of a bowl-shaped mountain valley. Prey and foes often don't notice him until far too late.

Old White Death holds his own survival as his highest goal, but he is far less lazy than most dragons in pursuing it. He regards the maintenance of his dominion as crucial to his own strength, though he has chosen not to strike at the creatures of Icewind Dale. This abstinence may be born of habit; the region was formerly part of the territory of the dragon known to humans as Icingdeath, and the two dragons came to an uneasy truce, ignoring each other and leaving each other's territories alone, rather than destroying each other in a battle for rule over the Reghed Glacier. Instead, Arauthator concentrates on carving ever-deeper tunnels into the Endless Ice Sea and the rock beneath, devouring all subterranean creatures he finds (chiefly gnomes) to unearth his own gem and mineral treasure and protect his realm against attack from below by exterminating all possible attackers.

These forays seem to attract remorhaz from the vast glacial areas that lie north of the Spine of the World, and Arauthator fights an ongoing battle against the ice-worms, devouring all of the remorhaz he defeats.

Northern giants and gnomes refer to these delvings as the Dragonholes and report that they consist of at least six separate tunnel complexes spread over a wide area north of the dragon's lair. Several observers have also mentioned that the dragon takes pleasure in slaying remorhaz, often hurling the monsters around like rag dolls before killing them, or folding his wings and wriggling across the ice to meet and fight them worm to worm.

Arauthator's lair

Arauthator lairs in the Lonefang, a prow-shaped mountain that rises out of the Endless Ice Sea several hundred miles due north of Mithril Hall. Intrepid adventurers report that it can be seen on the horizon by those who reach the frigid, wind-clawed northern faces of the Spine of the World mountains. Although Arauthator's home is thought to have a subterranean back entrance through glacial rifts many miles to the northwest (near the row of rock pinnacles known as the Worldwyrms' Teeth), the mountain itself has only one visible entrance: a vast shaft that cuts into the descending northern slope from above and plunges down to a cavern filled by a frozen lake. Here Arauthator hurls most of his spells at intruders seeking to reach the network of caverns at the far end of the lake, where he dwells.

The lair proper is known to include a bonepit; a cavern crammed with chunks of metallic ores; a cluttered central feeding and working cave that is home to some captured magical items; and an ancient iron structure that Old White Death uses as a prison for humans and smaller creatures he intends to devour later. This cage, a curious cylindrical enclosure divided into several internal chambers, is said by one escaped prisoner to look very much like some of the gnomish craft built to sail the skies from crystal sphere to sphere. A rising, trap-lined tunnel leads to a descending series of ice-walled storage caverns, each

opening into the next in a frozen waterfall of gems that Arauthator occasionally rolls around in, purring in catlike bliss.

Lying on his accustomed bed of diamonds in the last, lowest cavern, the dragon can look up through all of the hoard-caverns. He customarily reaches that bed by slithering down the river of gems, chuckling in contentment. A vertical shaft large enough to permit proper flight allows the old dragon fast ascent from the bottom of this cavern to a ledge overhanging the trap-lined approach tunnel. To leave, Arauthator customarily takes wing from the ledge and glides down the tunnel and out over the frozen lake before beating his wings in a mighty rush, to soar up the entrance shaft. No servants are known to serve Arauthator in his lair.

Arauthator's domain

From the Lonefang, Arauthator holds sway over a dominion that stretches from the Cold Run in the west (although he doesn't feed on the inhabitants of Icewind Dale, he has several times slain dragons who tried to raid or settle there) to Mount Caumarath in the east (the huge peak at the northern end of the Ice Mountains, northwest of Citadel Adbar). The northern boundary of this dragon's domain is unknown to men, but the southern extent of Arauthator's rule is marked by the Spine of the World range as far east as the Fell Pass, where the boundary swings south and east in a great arc to take in all the land north of Mithril Hall and the Citadel of Many Arrows.

All creatures in this vast, rocky wilderness (the headwaters of the River Surbrin) exist at Arauthator's pleasure, unless they keep to the Moonwood or the Coldwood for the white dragon never hunts prey in the trees. With the rise of civilization centered at Silverymoon, the supremacy of Arauthator's rule over this more southerly area may soon be tested.

The deeds of Arauthator

The favorite prey of Old White Death is full-grown frost giants (rarely available these days), closely followed by remorhaz and northern deer. Rothé and various bear species are next on the menu, and other dragons are also favored fare. Arauthator is less fond of the flesh of

2. In *Famous Legends and Lore of the North* (published in 1344 DR).

3. Detailed in the accessory sourcebook FOR1 *Draconomicon*, page 76.

4. *Ibid*, page 75.

orcs, bugbears, and other goblin, but such creatures make up much of his staple diet; without the dragon's presence, the frequency and numbers of orc hordes sweeping down through the Sword Coast North would no doubt be much greater.

Arauthator is known to use an *icemelt* spell both in his glacial delvings and to transform frozen lakes into temporary watering holes. He is careful never to feed or drink in a pattern that foes could observe and exploit. The dragon usually makes one long patrol of a part of his domain every day, plus a shorter, similar foray, and he usually feeds at least once a day, upon sighting suitable prey during the longer patrol. He may sleep atop a rocky height if tiring when far afield (once, boldly, atop Berun's Hill, in the territory of the green dragon Claugyliamatar), but he prefers to sleep on his bed of gems in the Lonefang. On rare occasions he keeps to his lair for three days or more, perfecting a new spell. Arauthator employs a wide array of detection and trap spells (most of the latter being cold-based) and is reported by several witnesses to wield spells effective against other dragons (such as *wingbind*³), and to enjoy freewheeling aerial clawing and raking battles rather than dodging among mountain peaks and sniping with his spells.

Arauthator is famous for tearing apart the venerable red dragon Rathalyaug high above the rooftops of Neverwinter in the Year of the Grimoire (1324 DR), in a spectacular battle at sunset. The white dragon dove down to smash apart a tower in triumph. He happened to choose the tower of the sorceress Shareera, who was smashed amid the toppling stones, even as the blood of the dying Rathalyaug — and his last, vain *firetrail* spell⁴ — rained down on the city.

Wizards also remember Arauthator for freezing the mage Phaulothlin of the Arcane Brotherhood⁵ solid, then shattering the helpless sorcerer against a mountainside. It seems that the haughty mage made the mistake of challenging the white dragon for ownership of a spellbook unearthed from the ice-covered grave of a Netherese wizard during mining north of Mirabar. Arauthator is thought to have a dozen or more gri-

moires hidden in his lair and also to be working away patiently at mastering all the spells in them. He has obviously transcended the traditional spell-handling limitations of white dragons that keep their verbal-only adaptations to wizard spells of the first level — but his personal limits are as yet unknown.

Old White Death also impressed watching wizards at the MageFair held on the western verges of Var the Golden several decades ago, by the ease with which he shouldered the blue wyrm Eltagrathuuloor into the side of Mount Gundar (the source of the River Gundar). The blow was powerful enough to cause a rockfall that brought most of the top of that peak down on his rival, burying Eltagrathuuloor alive.

Arauthator regards the white dragon Arveiatrace as an acceptable mate when he feels inclined. He employs a sending spell to call her to his lair for dalliance, giving her gems from his hoard after each mating but firmly escorting her out of his domain to rear any hatchlings that may result on her own. In the past, he is known to have mated with the gigantic white dragon Ghaulantatra, the "Old Mother Wyrm" worshiped by some orc tribes as a goddess. Arauthator exhibited no remorse when the beholder Thaluul destroyed Ghaulantatra and claimed her lair (somewhere in the mountains north of High Gap, between the Delimbiyr and the Fallen Lands).

Arauthator's love of a good fight has made him respected — and avoided — by other dragons. Only ambitious, overconfident younglings seek to defeat him, finding instead their own deaths. Arauthator makes no alliances and ignores the overtures of other dragons. He lusts after treasure of his own finding and magic of his own creation, and he can't be lured out of his domain by promises of gems or magic. The prospect of a good fight with another dragon always interests him, but he's too wise to leave the lands he knows so well just to do battle, since true foes always come to him eventually. He's too patient and calculating to be governed by hatreds, and he even seems to admire capable or wily foes. Old White Death has saluted adventuring bands he could easily have slain, after witnessing a clever ruse or bold stratagem on their part.

Arauthator seems especially busy these days developing new magics and seeking wizards' tombs within his domain to increase his personal magical might. He also seems wary of intrusions into his territory. Elminster is of the opinion that the old dragon may have witnessed the opening of a gate from another plane and been horrified at the realization of how easily unknown foes with powerful magic can penetrate his lair without warning.

Arauthator's magic

Old White Death commands a respectable roster of detection, entrapment, and combat spells, many of them variants of well-known wizard spells. He has also demonstrably developed magical means of triggering captured wands from afar, so that he can fire them at intruders in his lair without touching them directly. It must be stressed that human knowledge of Arauthator's magic is dangerously incomplete. Thanks to long and diligent observations by Felandaert the Farscrying of Candlekeep, however, we now have specifics of two of the dragon's spells:

Icemelt

(Alteration)

Level: 2

Range: 90 yds.

Components: V

Duration: 2 rounds

Casting Time: 2 (1 for Arauthator)

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell causes solid ice to vaporize, dissipating into the surrounding atmosphere without fog, water runoff, or heat. A cylindrical area 20' across and 10' deep is affected for each round of the spell's existence (the path of vaporization can't change direction from one round to the other), and natural or magical ice is prevented from forming within that area for 2d4 hours thereafter. The magic ends whenever there is no more ice to affect. Ice within an organic mass (such as a frozen body) is unaffected by this spell, even if the body is fully within the spell's area of effect. The caster chooses the site of initial ice vaporization (that is, where the cylinder of emptiness begins to form) by vision and act of will; it must be visible during casting.

5. This band of evil wizards, based in Luskan, is described in *Vole's Guide to the North*, pages 121-125.

Arauthator uses this magic primarily to dig tunnels through glacial ice in his search for treasure, but at least once used it to flood orcs out of subterranean tunnels by tapping a meltwater river under a glacier. (The spell temporarily prevented the exposed water from freezing by its prohibition on the formation of ice.)

Frost Vortex

(Evocation)

Level: 4

Range: 60 yds.

Components: V

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 8 (1 for Arauthator)

Area of Effect: 20'-radius sphere

Saving Throw: ½

This spell creates a tiny dustflake that either races toward a target creature or hangs motionless in a chosen spot, as an indefinitely-waiting trap (depending on the wording used during casting). The moving dustflake requires a successful attack roll (using the dragon's unmodified base THAC0) to hit its intended target, but either form of the

spell is triggered whenever any living creature larger than the caster's eyeball comes into contact with the dustflake.

When this occurs, the frost vortex takes effect. The air in a sphere centered on the dustmote whirls violently about with a harsh hissing noise, then grows very cold, coating all solid objects within it with thick frost, forcing item saving throws vs. cold. Living creatures within the vortex suffer 6d6 hp damage and must make a Strength check and a Constitution check. If one check fails, the creature is slowed to half movement rate for 1d4 rounds; if both checks fail, the creature falls (if on foot) or crashes (if flying) due to the spell's icy coating, suffering an additional 1d4 hp damage (no saving throw), forcing saving throws vs. fall on all fragile items. Once activated, a *frost vortex* is gone within a round, leaving no moisture, ice, nor rushing of air behind.

Arauthator uses this spell both in combat and as a trap, leaving its waiting motes in tempting alcoves and blind passages in the walls of its lair.

Arauthator's fate

It's likely Old White Death will die violently, but he's begun to seem ageless, and certainly too wily to be slain easily by any rival dragon. It's rumored he's taken to hiring certain adventurers, via *sendings*, to retrieve the hoards of dragons he has slain, rather than leaving his domain to seize them himself. This seemingly prudent practice may offer a foe the chance to introduce harmful (perhaps explosive) magic into the treasure taken to Arauthator — and certainly treacherous adventurers could use their mission to get closer to Old White Death than most humans could ever hope to do, before launching an attack.



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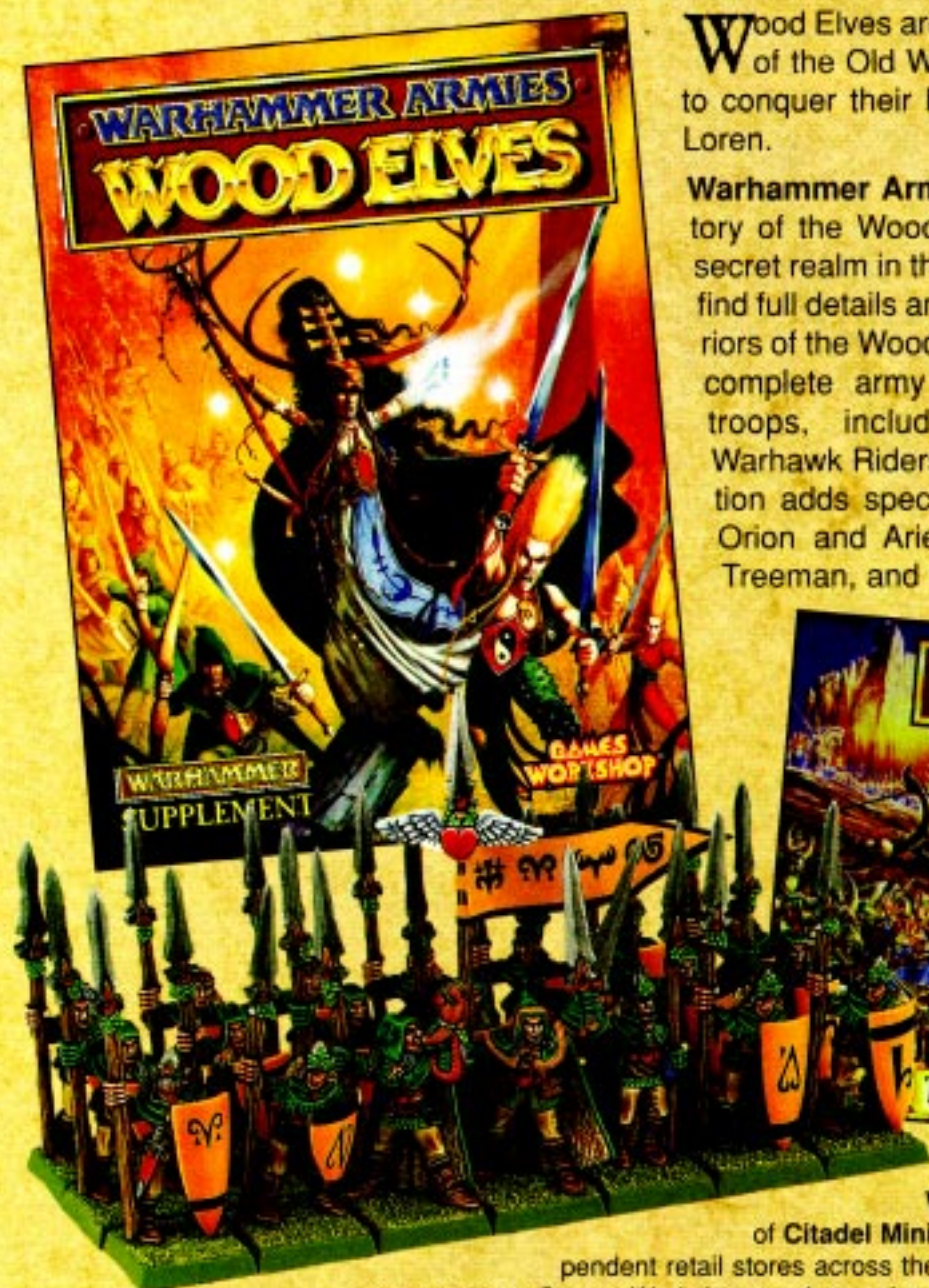
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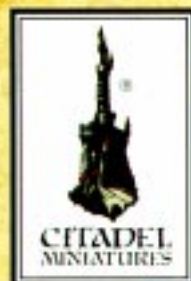
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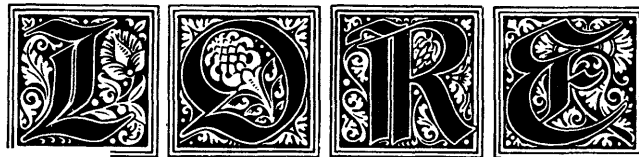
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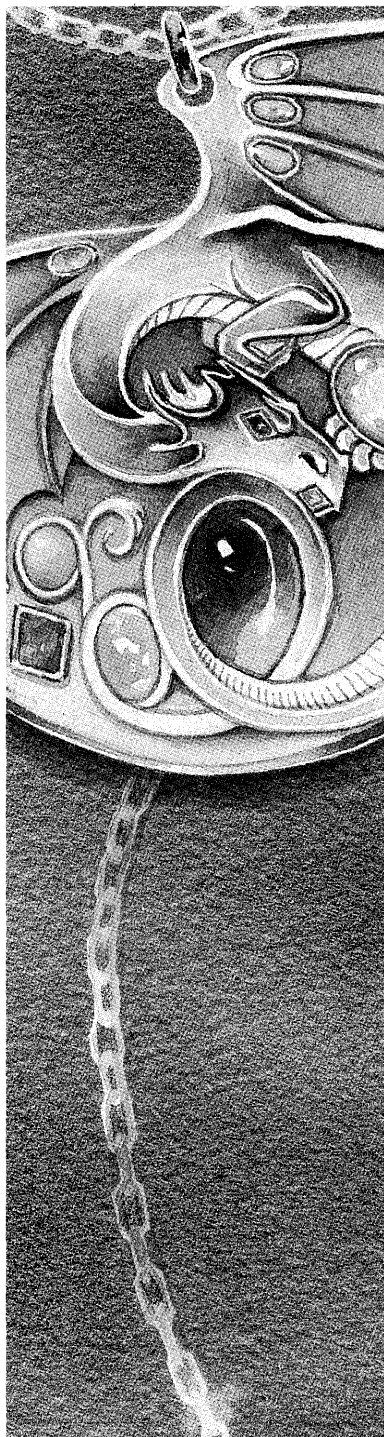
Dragon Dweomers

The original "Dragon Dweomers" article appeared in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #218. Like those in the earlier work, the spells presented here fall in the category of dragon magic. In short, dragon magic is the term given to spells and magical effects devised by dragons, for dragons; other creatures simply cannot use dragon magic or, at best, suffer strange and dangerous side effects when casting such spells. Readers interested in a thorough examination of the subject should refer to *The Draconomicon* (FOR1).

In addition to the new spells, an index of draconic spells compiled from *DRAGON Magazine* and other AD&D® game accessories has been included at the end of the article.

Dragon magical items

The creation of dragon magical items is a facet of dragon magic that is generally overlooked and, to put it mildly, usually misunderstood. We all know about the magical items that are intended to be used against dragons (e.g., *swords of dragon slaying*, *potions of dragon control*, *scrolls of protection against dragon breath weapons*, etc.). We also know that certain dragon parts can be used to create magical items (such as dragon hide for magical armor and shields). But throughout the AD&D game, few magical items are assumed to have been created by dragons, and fewer still that only dragons can use. *The Draconomicon* provides a handful of such items, but considering that dragons are prolific spell-users, it seems odd that there aren't more draconic magical



Wizardry for wyrms

by Robert S. Mullin

illustrated by Bob Klasnich

items around. This section attempts fill that void, at least in part.

Note: The XP values for these magical items were included for the sake of completeness. They are particularly useful in a *Council of Wyrms* campaign, however, as dragon characters in that setting must accumulate experience points in order to advance in level. In other settings, the XP values can be ignored.

Amulet of Supremacy

Only a handful of these potent devices are believed to exist, for the ability to create them is limited to the most powerful dragons, both in age and magical ability. Any dragon is capable of using these devices, however.

An *amulet of supremacy* is nothing short of a masterpiece, for it is constructed of the purest metals, the finest jewels and gemstones, and the artistry of a master craftsman. In fact, the jewelry value alone for such a device approaches 100,000 gp. To dragons, an amulet of supremacy is priceless.

When worn, an *amulet of supremacy* causes a dragon's breath weapon, spells, and natural spell-like powers to operate at their maximum potential (i.e., maximum damage, duration, area of effect, etc.). Saving throws against these effects still apply, however.

An *amulet of supremacy* is strictly a draconic device; if worn by any other species, death is immediate, usually taking the form of instantaneous immolation or disintegration, with no saving throw allowed.

XP Value: 10,000



Dragon Fangs

This device is a hinged mouthpiece to which are attached several metal fang caps. By placing the device in its mouth and sliding its fangs into the hollow caps, the dragon can use the magic of the dragon fangs.

Dragon fangs come in two varieties. The weaker variety bears a permanent *sharptooth* dweomer, the other a permanent *razorfangs* enchantment. Both versions duplicate the effects of the spells they carry (see *DRAGON Magazine* #218 for details of both spells), but as long as the dragon wears them, the *dragon fangs* continue to function; they are not restricted by casting time, duration, and so forth.

Dragon fangs are difficult to manufacture, as they can be used only by the dragon for whom they were created. They adjust in size in order to fit the dragon's teeth as it grows older, but unless the dragon has an identical twin, clone, simulacrum, or the like, no other dragon can use the set of *dragon fangs*.

XP Value: 500 (*sharptooth* variety)

XP Value: 1,000 (*razorfangs* variety)

Focus Object

One of the more serious dilemmas a dragon must face when defending its lair from invaders is how to go about dispatching such opponents without destroying its hoard. Many dragons rely on the *hoardguard* spell (see *DRAGON Magazine* #218) to solve the problem, but most don't have access to that spell. Therefore, such dragons must resort to other methods, like a *focus object*.

Focus objects take many forms but most often appear as a piece of jewelry that the dragon can wear, as the dragon must be in contact with the device in order to use its powers.

A *focus object* allows the dragon to reduce the effective area of its breath weapon so that only a single target suffers damage from a direct attack. Thus, cloud- or cone-shaped breath weapons become narrow shafts. Breath weapons that already take such a form (e.g., acid, lightning, etc.) cannot be reduced by the device. Despite its altered dimensions, the breath weapon's damage is not diminished, and saving throws against it are not modified for the reduced area.

Obviously, *focus objects* have limited use among dragons, as such devices are restricted to dragons whose breath weapons have a large area of effect. There are rumors, however, that similar devices have been constructed for use by other creatures who possess breath weapons, such as gorgons, certain golems, etc.

XP Value: 1,000

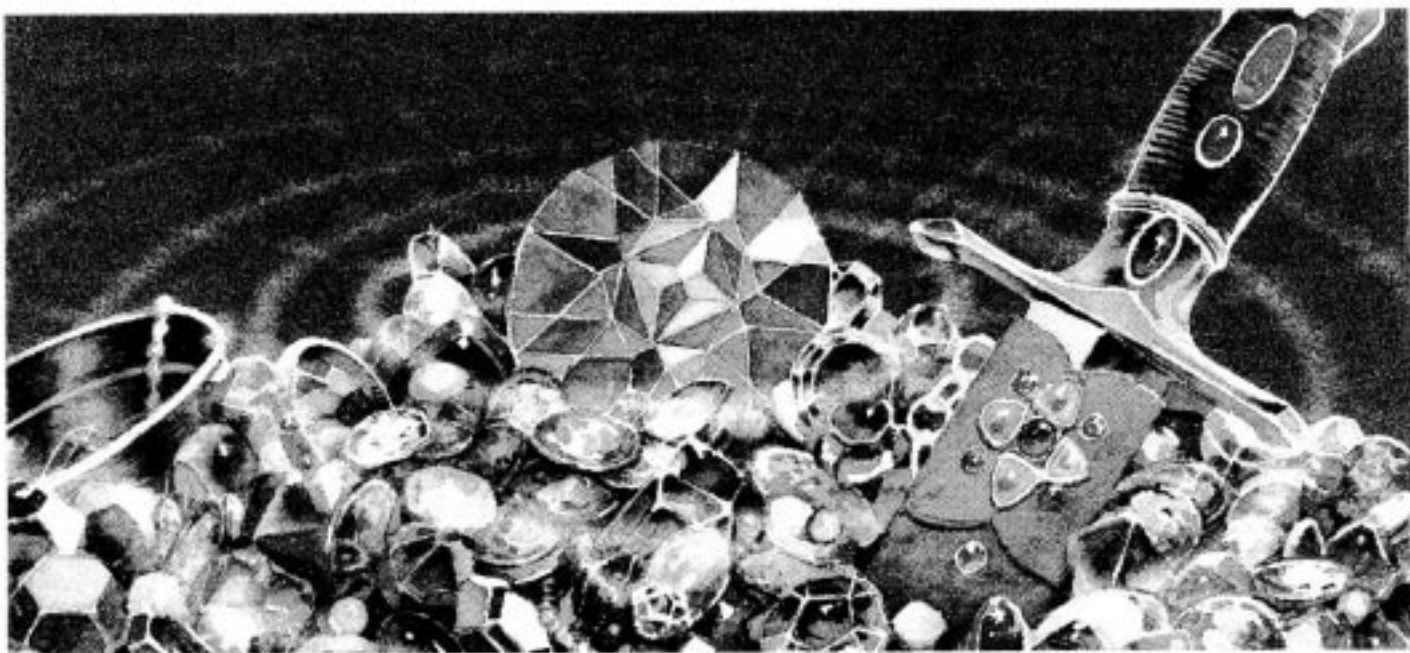
Hoardstone

A dragon's status among its peers is determined by several factors. The dragon's personal might is the most obvious one, but its species, age, experience, and intellect are important as well. Perhaps the least considered element, however, is the value of a dragon's hoard. Often, the value of a dragon's hoard is just as important to its status as any of the other factors. A *hoardstone* facilitates a dragon's status in this

regard by temporarily increasing the quality and value of items in close proximity to it (i.e., the dragon's hoard).

A *hoardstone* always takes the form of a flawless gemstone of any type, but it must have a value of at least 5,000 gp. It functions in a manner quite similar to a *jewel of flawlessness*, but where the jewel affects only gemstones, a *hoardstone* affects all items within its area of effect (a 50'-radius sphere around the *hoardstone*), including seemingly worthless items.

All objects within the area increase in value by 25%. In the case of monetary treasure, this is an immediate and obvious increase. For example, flaws in jewels and gemstones disappear or diminish, precious metals become purer, works of art become more intricate or vibrant, and so forth. Magical items, however, do not grow in power, but the materials from which they are made increase in quality and value. For example, a carved and gem-studded staff becomes more valuable monetarily (i.e., the gems rise in value, the wood is of greater quality, the carvings more intricate, etc.), but it does not gain additional charges nor do its effects become more powerful. Items that have no monetary value (e.g., a normal stone or piece of wood) do not suddenly become so endowed. Instead, the *hoardstone's* influence causes the quality and value of such objects to increase in comparison to similar items. For example, a worthless chunk of wood remains a worthless chunk of wood, but the *hoardstone's* influence makes it more durable by tightening its grain, strengthening and hardening the wood, and so



on. The piece of wood might be valuable if sculpted thereafter, but until then, it remains an ordinary piece of wood.

Items that are separated from the influence of the *hoardstone* retain their increased value for a period of time equal to that they spent in the presence of the *hoardstone*. For example, a gemstone that spent a year under the influence of a *hoardstone* retains its value increase for one year after being separated from that influence. Once that year has passed, the gemstone returns to its normal value.

Although a *hoardstone* radiates magic, the items it influences do not, unless such items are normally magical, of course. (If the dragon's entire hoard radiated a *dweomer*, any visiting dragons the *hoardstone's* owner was attempting to impress would likely realize that the hoard's value was magically enhanced, which would, no doubt, cause the dragon actually to lose status.) Furthermore, multiple *hoardstones* placed in the same hoard do not cause the hoard's value to increase any more than if only a single *hoardstone* were present.

Hoardstones, or any facsimile thereof, can be created only by dragons. The reason for this has something to do with the unique relationship between a dragon and its hoard. Dragons, more than any other species, are driven by an irresistible need to accumulate treasure, an inherited urge they cannot escape. Thus, only they truly understand the "spirit" of valuable objects, an understanding that is necessary to manufacture a *hoardstone*. Other creatures may utilize a captured *hoardstone*, however. (Dwarves, in particular, love them.)

XP Value: 5,000

Wing Armor

When dragons fight, they usually fight for keeps. Against weaker foes, they are merciless, rarely allowing their enemies to escape. When faced with superior opposition, however, they are not quite so fearless, but if pushed into a corner, they pull out all the stops in order to ensure their continued existence. These things are particularly true when dragons fight one another, for when two dragons engage in battle, the wounds they inflict upon each other can be terrible. (After all, who recognizes a dragon's weaknesses more quickly than another dragon?) And what is a dragon's greatest physical weakness? The answer is simple: its wings.

When compared to the rest of its body, a dragon's wings are especially susceptible to grievous, even crippling damage. The relatively thin flesh of a dragon's wings is easily ripped by the teeth and claws of another dragon. Such can reduce its effectiveness in flight, force it to land, or — worse yet — cause the dragon to plummet uncontrollably to the earth.

Because of this potential danger, more and more dragons are making use of wing armor, a pair of "sleeves" composed of an extremely fine, fibrous, metallic fabric (elven chain mail has nothing on this stuff) that is slipped over the wings for added protection. Wing armor is virtually weightless and magically adjusts to fit the dragon's wings, but it does not hinder the dragon's movements or flying ability in any way. In fact, the "sleeves" are so formfitting that straps and harnesses are unnecessary to hold them in place.

Wing armor does not provide any bonuses to the dragon's AC, but it does render the dragon's wings immune to puncturing and shredding by piercing and slashing weapons, as well by claws and teeth. Note, however, that a wing can still be injured from the concussive force of such attacks; wing armor simply prevents the actual piercing or tearing of a dragon's wings.

The origin of wing armor is uncertain, but dragons have the credit for devising it, as they are one of the few winged creatures who possess the necessary magical abilities.

XP Value: 1,000

Dragon Spells

Hoard Servant

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 1

Range: 10 yds.

Components: V

Duration: 1 hour per level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell is the draconic version of the standard *unseen servant* spell. Since the needs of a dragon are far greater than those of lesser races (according to dragons), a common *unseen servant* just doesn't possess the physical strength to fulfill its required tasks.

Unlike an *unseen servant*, a *hoard servant's* sole purpose is to tend the hoard of the casting dragon. In fact, the spell is cast on the hoard itself, binding the *hoard servant* to it for the duration of the

spell; it may never move more than 10 yards away from the hoard without negating the spell. (Note that a dragon's hoard must be in a single location for the purposes of this spell, not secreted in a number of separate lairs.) Once the spell is cast, the *hoard servant* polishes jewels and gems, separates and stacks coins, organizes chests and boxes, etc. It is stronger than a standard *unseen servant*, able to carry 50 lbs. or push or pull 100 lbs. over smooth surfaces. It can also withstand more damage than an *unseen servant*, possessing 15 hit points instead of the usual 6. A *hoard servant* is identical to an *unseen servant* with regards to its limitations and means of destruction.

This spell is particularly favored by metallic and gem dragons, both of whom seem more interested in the appearance of their hoards than do other dragons.

Scale Shift

(Alteration)

Level: 1

Range: 0

Components: V

Duration: 1 turn per level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

With this spell, a dragon can change the color of its scales to that of another type of dragon. Note, however, that the color change must be within the dragon's related group (i.e., chromatic dragons can change their color only to that of other chromatic dragons). Thus, a red dragon can change the color of its scales to green, blue, and so forth, but not to gold, silver, emerald, sapphire, etc.

This spell changes only the dragon's color, not its physical form. Therefore, if a white dragon changes the color of its scales to black, it retains the form of a white dragon. The color change is usually enough to fool most observers, however, for there are few beings who can recognize a dragon by its anatomy.. Notable exceptions to this rule are other dragons and those with the dragon lore proficiency (described on page 20, in this issue's "Dragonslayers" article).

While the spell lasts, the dragon may change colors as it desires, but doing so in view of others may ruin the deception, and returning to the dragon's actual color ends the spell immediately. A successful *dispel magic* ends the spell prematurely as well.

Since the majority of dragons emphasize the superiority of their own particu-

lar subspecies, this spell is not as popular among dragonkind as one might think. Often, the spell is used by dragons who must rely on guile to assure their continued survival. Weak or crippled dragons are the usual practitioners, as deception is a matter of survival and, therefore, a necessity. Older dragons of this sort often use the spell in conjunction with the *alter breath weapon* spell to make the ruse even more convincing.

Dragonbane

(Divination)

Level: 2

Range: 10 yds. per level

Components: V

Duration: 1 turn +1 round per level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: 10-yd. wide path

Saving Throw: None

This highly specialized spell combines *detect magic* and *identify* spells in such a way that the dragon caster can determine whether any object within the spell's area of effect carries a dweomer specifically related to dragons and dragon magic. Thus, any magical item capable of discharging dragon

magic spells (or that were created with dragon magic), weapons of *dragon slaying*, *potions of dragon control*, even an *Orb of Dragonkind*, are noted by the dragon. Likewise, *dragonbane* detects active spells (including dragon magic spells) that produce such effects.

The dragon does not learn the exact properties or power of any enchantment so noted. For example, a simple *sword +1, +2 vs. dragons* appears no more or less dangerous to the dragon than an intelligent *sword +5, dragon slayer* with the special purpose power enabling it to slay dragons with a single stroke. The only thing the caster knows is that both weapons are more powerful against dragons than against other creatures.

In any case, this spell is not a replacement for *detect magic* or *identify*. Its primary function, and the reason for which it was created, is to use during battle, as it allows the dragon to determine whether its foes are using magical items and spells that are especially dangerous to dragonkind. This way, the dragon knows whom to concentrate its attacks against or whom to avoid if things get sticky.

It is rumored that the spell-using races among giantkind have developed a spell similar to *dragonbane*. If this is the case, other races may have done so as well. The spell-using undead seem likely candidates to have done the same, as many spells and magical devices have been created to use against undead creatures.

Scalespray

(Alteration)

Level: 3

Range: 0

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: 50-yard radius

Saving Throw: ½

Sleeping on a cold stone floor or rolling around on a pile of treasure is rough on the hide. The frequent pokes and prods from weapons, stalagmites, and the remains of yesterday's armored lunch often cause a dragon's layered scales to become loose and fall off in places. And that says nothing for the coins, gems, and the occasional halfling thief mashed up in there! *Scalespray* takes advantage of this condition by



hurling the loosened scales, gems, coins, bones, and so forth, away from the dragon's body as missile weapons. When the spell is cast, all creatures in the area of effect are showered with these projectiles, suffering 1d6 hp damage per age category of the dragon. A saving throw vs. breath weapon reduces the damage by half.

This spell does not see as much use as might be expected, since many dragons like the idea of having bits of treasure stuck to their hides — it makes them look more impressive. Thus, the spell's usefulness is often outweighed by the dragon's own vanity.

Clutch Ward

(Alteration)

Level: 4

Range: Touch

Components: V

Duration: Special

Casting Time: Special

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This simple yet highly useful spell utilizes teleportation magic to protect the unhatched eggs of the dragon. During casting, the dragon handles each egg in the clutch, the entire process requiring 1 round of casting time per egg. Thereafter, the spell lies dormant until activated.

Upon completion of the spell, no creature other than the casting dragon may so much as touch a single egg within the clutch without triggering its magic. When the spell is activated, all of the eggs immediately *teleport without error* (as the spell) to another location known to the dragon, which is determined during the spell's casting. If each egg is subjected to a separate casting of the spell, however, an individual egg can have its own destination point (though this is rarely done).

In addition, the casting dragon is immediately aware that the spell has been triggered, regardless of distance between the dragon and the eggs (including planar boundaries). If the dragon was asleep at the time, it is instantly awakened and alert.

The duration of the spell is indefinite, lying dormant until activated. Once activated, the spell must be cast anew if the eggs are to remain protected. Otherwise, nothing short of a *limited wish* can negate the spell. If an egg hatches prior to the spell's activation, the newborn dragon does not trigger the magic, though the hatchling itself is no longer

protected by the clutch ward and is left behind if the spell is later activated.

It is uncertain whether nondragon versions of this spell exist, but it seems likely that other egg-laying, spell-casting races would have such a variant.

Alter Breath Weapon

(Alteration)

Level: 6

Range: 0

Components: V

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

With this spell, a dragon causes its breath weapon to take on the appearance and properties of the breath of another type of dragon. For dragons who possess multiple breath weapon forms, only one is changed by the spell. In any case, the spell causes an actual change, not an illusion. Furthermore, the amount of damage caused by the altered breath weapon is the same as that of the dragon's true breath weapon; only the type, not the power, of breath weapon is changed.

For example, a red dragon can use this spell to change its fiery breath weapon into a cloud of chlorine gas (as used by green dragons), but with a damage potential equal to its usual flame breath weapon. By using this spell, the dragon is able to harm creatures that are normally immune or resistant to its fiery breath (e.g., another red dragon). Of course, a creature immune to chlorine gas or to dragon breath weapons in general is still unharmed by the attack.

Alter breath weapon can be ended prematurely with a successful *dispel magic* or similar effect, or by silent will of the dragon. However, the spell does not permit the dragon to shift through multiple types of breath weapons; once a particular type of breath weapon is chosen, it cannot be changed, save to revert back to the dragon's true breath weapon, ending the spell. Likewise, multiple *alter breath weapon* spells cannot be in effect at the same time. If a second *alter breath weapon* is attempted before the first expires, both spells are immediately negated.

Except that this spell is purely draconic, its origins are unknown, even among dragons. It does see widespread use, however, suggesting that it is quite old, perhaps even one of the first draconic enchantments of its level. In addition, there have been scattered reports

of "touch" versions of this spell that allow the dragon caster to alter the breath weapons of non-draconic creatures (like gorgons), as well as those of other dragons.

Death Matrix

(Evocation, Necromancy)

Level: 8

Range: 0

Components: V

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 1 turn

Area Of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: ½

All dragons know that, eventually, they will die. Many dragons, however, believe that death will come in battle. Because of this, *death matrix* was developed to serve as the ultimate contingency against would-be dragon slayers.

When this spell is cast, an extremely powerful and complex pattern of magical energy is woven into the dragon's lifeforce, and it cannot be negated (or even detected) by any means short of a full *wish*. Thereafter, the magic lies dormant until activated, but it grows in strength as the dragon ages, due to its connection with the dragon's lifeforce.

Upon the dragon's demise, the death matrix is triggered, causing the dragon's corpse to blow apart in an enormous explosion that showers a 50-yard radius sphere with gem-encrusted scales, muscle and sinew, bones, claws, fangs, innards, and blood — and the raw, unrestrained might of the dragon's breath weapon. All creatures within the radius must immediately save vs. breath weapon. If the save is successful, the damage caused by the explosion is reduced by half. Otherwise, the explosion inflicts an amount of damage equal to the breath weapon of the dragon. Worse still, any damage die result of a 1 or 2 is regarded as a 3; thus, the triggered death matrix of a great red wyrm inflicts an astounding 84-252 hp damage (24d10+12, counting all rolls of 1 or 2 as 3).

Note, however, that since the explosion includes the hurled body parts of the dragon and basic concussive force in addition to the dragon's breath weapon, immunity to that breath weapon does not necessarily provide immunity to damage. Roughly 1/3 of the total damage is caused by the breath weapon energy, so immunities to that breath weapon apply only to 2/3 of the damage. Finally, objects exposed to the blast must save vs. disintegration or be



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Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, *DRAGON® Magazine*, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, *DRAGON Magazine*, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).



June Conventions

Card-Con

June 1-2

IL

Prairie Capital Convention Center, Springfield. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: Tournaments, dealers, and artist guests. Registration: \$20. Lamont E. Gary, 209 Springcreek Dr., Springfield IL, 62702.

Blue Water Con

June 8

MI

Charles Schoor VFW, Port Huron. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Heidi King, 1522 10th Ave. #5, Port Huron, MI 48060.

Magnum Opus Con/War

June 13-16

GA

Radisson Hotel, Atlanta. Special guests: Vernon Wells, Charlie Dierkop, and Robert Zubrin. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and computer games. MOC-11, P.O. Box 6585, Athens, GA 30604, or e-mail: moc@ix.netcom.com.

Con Games

June 15-16

FL

Camberly Inn Hotel, Tampa. Events: role-playing,

card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, a charity raffle, and tournaments. Registration: varies. Necronomicon Inc., P.O. Box 2076, Riverview, FL 33569.

D-Day

June 20-23

CA

Game Towne, Carlsbad. Annual San Diego County board game championships, miniatures gaming, and a painting contest. Write to: D-Day, Game Towne, 2933 Roosevelt, Carlsbad, CA 92008.

Dragon Con 1996

June 20-23

GA

Atlanta Hilton and Towers, Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel, and the Atlanta Civic Center in Atlanta. Guests: Kevin J. Anderson, William Gibson, James O'Barr, R.A. Salvatore, Larry Elmore, and Bruce Sterling. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, films, anime, tournaments, and workshops. Registration: \$50 preregistered. Dragon Con, P.O. Box 47696, Atlanta, GA 30362, or e-mail: dragoncon@dragoncon.org, or check out the web site: <http://www.dscga.com/~dragoncon>.

ManaFest

June 21-23

CA

Cathedral Hill Hotel, San Francisco. Events: over 25 different *Magic: the Gathering®* and other trading card tournaments. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$30 thereafter. ManaFest, Khalsa Brain Games, P.O. Box 170436, San Francisco, CA 94117, or visit the web site: <http://www.ibar.com/manafest>.

Mobi-Con

June 21-23

AL

Howard Johnson, Mobile. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Greg Musslewhite, 7631 Penny Lane, Irvington, AL 36544.

ATCon II

June 27-30

TX

Ramada Inn, Austin. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA® tournaments, an auction, and a costume contest. Registration: \$25 on site. G.O.A.T., P.O. Box 3116, Austin, TX, 78764.

Clathricon

June 28-30

IN

Holiday Inn Airport, Evansville. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Toni Cobb, 2600

- ✦ Australian convention
- ✦ Canadian convention
- ✦ European convention

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Important:

DRAGON® Magazine does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

Hillcrest Terrace, Evansville, IN 47712.

Michicon '96

June 28-30

MI

Van Dyke Park Hotel and Conference Center, Warren. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers and an auction. Registration: \$18 preregistered, \$20 on site. Metro Detroit Gamers, P.O. Box 656, Wyandotte, MI 48192 or e-mail: dolphin2@oeonline.com.

PolyCon XIV

June 28-30

CA

California Polytechnic, San Luis Obispo. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$25 on-site. PolyCon Committee, University Union Box 168, Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407, or e-mail: polycon@polycon.punk.net.

July Conventions

Origins

July 4-7

OH

Greater Columbus Convention Center, Columbus. Special guests: Phil Foglio, Doug Niles, Jeff Grubb, and Kate Novak. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, the *Magic: the Gathering* national championship, and an auction. Registration: \$34.95 preregis-

tered. Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 1740, Renton, WA 98057-1740, or e-mail: Andon@aol.com.

Camefest

July 6

IL

Holy Innocents Church, Chicago. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: \$5. John Kavain, 857 North Hermitage, Chicago, IL 60622

Dexcon 5

July 10-14

NJ

Atrium Park, Somerset. Guests: Scott Douglas, Robert Wiese, Dori Hein, and Bill Olmesdahl. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments. Registration: varies. Vinny Salzillo, Double Exposure, Inc., P.O. Box 3594, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Hexacon

July 12-14

AZ

Arizona State University Memorial Union, Tempe. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, tournaments, an auction, a miniatures painting contest, and a computer room. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$20 on site. Hexacon 6, P.O. Box 62613, Phoenix, AZ 85082-2613.

Skirmishes '96

July 12-14

MO

Holiday Inn South, Kansas

City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Skirmishes, 812 N.E. 100 Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64155.

VII-Khan

July 12-14

CO

Holiday Inn North, Colorado Springs. Guests: Wil McCarthy. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an art show, dealers, panels, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$15 preregistered. VII-Khan, 1025 Garner St. 10B, Colorado Springs, CO 80905, <http://www.uccs.edu/~dafauson>.

Dark Con III

July 19-21

OK

Central Plaza Hotel, Oklahoma City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, computer gaming, and RPGA Network events. Darkmore Inc., 624 SW 24th, Moore, OK 73160.

Quincon XI

July 19-21

IL

The Signature Room in the Franklin Square, Quincy. Events: role-playing, card, board, miniatures games, RPGA events, demos, and an auction. Registration: \$15/weekend, \$5/day. Quincon XI, P.O. Box 3892, Quincy, IL 62305-3892.

Action 2

July 20

IA

Plaza Lanes, Des Moines. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA tournaments. Registration: \$4. Tammy Jones, 1304 Boyd St., Des Moines, IA 50316.

Online XXII

July 27-28

Genie

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LIVING CITY™ and LIVING JUNGLE™ tournaments, Virtual Seattle, and guest speakers. E-mail: the.minstrel@genie.com.

August Conventions

Gamefest XVII

August 6-10

CA

Old Towne, San Diego. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$30 on site. Gamefest, 3954 Harney St., San Diego, CA 92110.

Migscon XVII

August 23-25

The Royal Connaught Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel, Hamilton, Ontario. Events: miniature gaming, dealers, and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: varies. MIGS, P.O. Box 37013, Barton Postal Outlet, Hamilton, ON L8L 8E9, Canada.

Bubonicon 28

August 23-25

NM

Howard Johnson East, Albuquerque. Guests: Dennis McKiernan, Gordan Garb, and Lisa Scott. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, panels, an art show, a costume contest, movies, and more. Registration: \$25 on site. NMSF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque, NM 87178.

Dragonflight

August 23-25

WA

Bellarmino Hall on the Seattle University Campus, Seattle. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: seminars, an auction, and dealers. Registration: varies. Dragonflight, P.O. Box 417, Seattle, WA 98111-0417.

LA Con III

August 29-Sept. 3

CA

Anaheim Convention center, Anaheim. Guests: James White, Roger Corman, and

Continued on page 58

GEN CON® Game Fair

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WI

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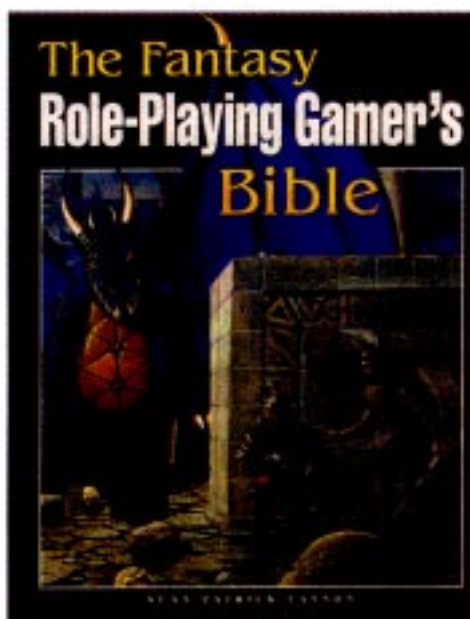
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The Role of Books

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The Fantasy Role-Playing Gamer's Bible

Sean Patrick Fannon
Prima

\$19.95

"The very word is intimidating," says Sean Patrick Fannon as he discusses the nature of bibles in this book's introduction. But that hasn't stopped him from writing a wide-ranging and thoroughly cogent volume that provides more information and advice on gaming than any other single reference book published on the subject to date.

The virtues of Fannon's tome are threefold: it's comprehensive, it's accessible, and it's entertaining. The first of these is in some respects the most significant. Like prior encyclopedists Lawrence Schick and Rick Swan (whose works he cheerfully acknowledges), Fannon devotes considerable attention to a survey of available game products. But *The Fantasy Role-Playing Gamer's Bible* is much more than a compilation of reviews. Before he discusses or recommends specific products, Fannon spends almost two-thirds of the book discussing the concept of role-playing in general, the ins and outs of creating and running a gaming campaign, and the history of the gaming industry. Thus the book is as much a how-to manual as a guide to game systems. It's a unique combination, and a valuable one.

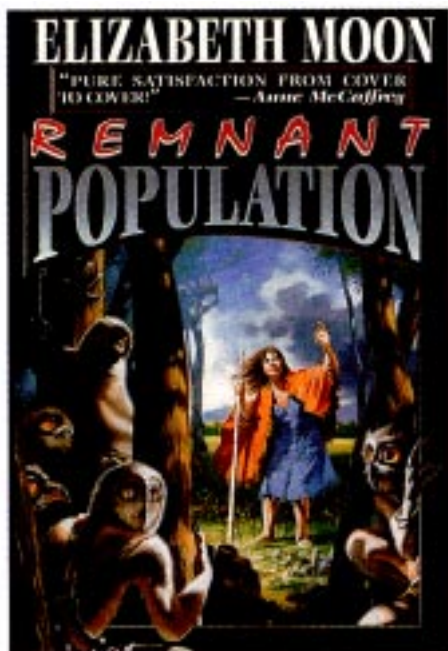
As a result, Fannon is writing more for novice gamers and those unfamiliar with the hobby than for veteran players. While the book is by no means free of jargon, Fannon deliberately targets his explanations at people who don't necessarily know a d20 from a hood ornament and those who've never darkened the doors of a gaming convention. An extensive glossary supplements the main text, and the book is also liberally peppered with mini-essays on a variety of specific subjects. Although he's not shy about offering opinions, Fannon doesn't present himself as an Ultimate Authority. Instead, he readily gives credit for ideas and examples where credit is due, both in the text and in an extensive list of acknowledgements.

If all this makes the *Bible* sound like a dull, scholarly volume, think again. On the contrary, Fannon's writing style is deliberately amusing and self-referential, with a good deal of the humor at his own expense. At the same time, he doesn't let the comedy get in the way of the content; the gaming-history material, for

instance, is straightforward and shtick-free. Those who glance into the book looking for some specific bit of information are likely to find themselves still reading 20 minutes and 15 pages later.

If there's a substantial nit to be picked, it's in Fannon's treatment of gaming history. On the plus side, Fannon's survey is knowledgeable and balanced, demonstrating that the roots of role-playing's go back considerably farther than Gary Gygax's living room. But once he reaches the D&D® era, his focus narrows too much; he concentrates on game companies and design trends while giving only sparse attention to evolution on the players' side of the cash register. Even within his chosen niche, there's room to quibble over emphasis. Arguably, for instance, the network of talent fostered by Flying Buffalo, Inc. gets less mention than it should, and Mark Rein Hagen's and Jonathan Tweet's *Ars Magica** is passed over too quickly. Additionally, gamers interested in the industry's corporate and legal wrangles won't be enlightened here; Fannon doesn't even mention the famous government raid on Steve Jackson Games.

Still, Fannon correctly notes that a full history of the gaming industry is beyond the scope of his *Bible*, and the material included is more than adequate as an introductory sketch. The bottom line is that *The Fantasy Role-Playing Gamer's Bible*, for practical purposes, lives up to its title. Sean Patrick Fannon's guidebook gives readers new to gaming a solid introduction to the hobby, and even experienced gamers will find useful advice, entertaining anecdotes, and intelligent reviews within its pages. There's room left on the reference shelf for more detailed books on specific aspects of gaming, but as a general survey of the field, this volume can't be matched.



Remnant Population

Elizabeth Moon

Baen

\$22.00

In certain respects, *Remnant Population* is about as subtle as a herd of stampeding elephants. But although Elizabeth Moon's first hardcover novel wears its social agenda on its sleeve, it's also an intriguing first-contact yarn with dimensions that aren't at all obvious at first glance. The conventional logic of first contact says that it's a job best left to experts. The protagonists of A. C. Crispin's *StarBridge* books, for instance, may be young, but they're trained extensively in various scientific and diplomatic disciplines before being sent into the field.

Elizabeth Moon, however, suggests otherwise. As her story opens, an interstellar corporation is evacuating one of its colony worlds because they're losing too much money trying to maintain the settlement there. Elderly Ofelia Falfurrias, however, would just as soon stay behind, and when the rest of the colonists (including her son and his wife) depart, she hides and is left all alone in the remains of the colony's small village. But what seems at first to be peaceful solitude quickly becomes complicated and unsettling. First, Ofelia overhears the destruction of a new set of would-be colonists on the village's abandoned communications gear, and then the natives responsible for the deaths turn up on her own doorstep.

This is where the meat of the novel begins, as Ofelia—who is neither highly educated nor physically imposing—gradually comes to terms with the

aliens. It's an utterly fascinating process, made oddly intense by the fact that for much of the book, Ofelia is the only human character onstage, among a species that doesn't communicate well in human language. Thus we watch as both Ofelia and the People learn about each other by example, conveying by action and behavior what they're not able to explain in words.

In many hands, such a narrative could have been impressively dull. Moon, however, manages to keep the story interesting within its self-imposed limits. There's a predictable quality to the final part of the novel, once a traditional survey team arrives to look the aliens over, but it doesn't come at the expense of the characters Moon has already developed. The tale's moral is made clear at once: the younger, more intellectual scientists initially dismiss Ofelia and her experiences as valueless, but they rapidly discover that the People think otherwise. Moon delivers the "respect your elders" and "don't judge by appearance" messages with all the tact of a teacher rapping her students' knuckles with a ruler—yet she stops short of actually preaching.

Remnant Population is a sharply executed first-contact novel, the interaction between Ofelia and the People may interest gamers for another reason. What Moon presents, often in intricate detail, is also in many ways a classic role-playing situation; the difference between Ofelia's approach and that of the so-called "experts" parallels the difference between a rich character-driven RPG campaign and a lively but un-challenging hack-and-slash session. That makes Moon's novel a valuable study guide for those interested in sharpening their role-playing skills, as well as a sophisticated SF tale for more general readers.

Eye of the Daemon

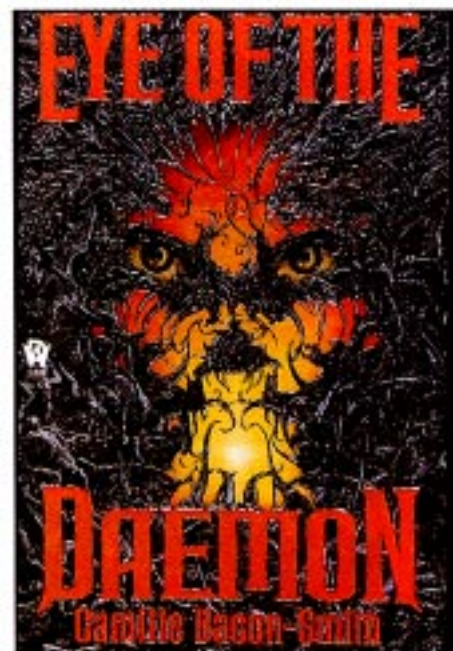
Camille Bacon-Smith

DAW

\$5.50

From the packaging, you'd expect Camille Bacon-Smith's first professionally published novel to be a chilling occult thriller. In fact, *Eye of the Daemon* is turned in a different direction; Bacon-Smith instead attempts to present a strongly character-driven tale of choices and sacrifices on a cosmic scale. Unfortunately, the characters driving her story appear to be stuck in a traffic circle during rush hour.

Part of the difficulty is that it takes awhile to establish just who is Bacon-



Smith's lead character. "Kevin Bradley," whose real name is Badad, appears to have the role at first. Seemingly an urbane private investigator specializing in supernatural cases, he's actually an agent of a larger occult entity from another plane, in residence on Earth to check an extraplanar rival's efforts to enslave humanity. As the novel opens, Badad is accepting a case involving a young man whose disappearance is connected to that rivalry.

Before long, the focus has shifted to Badad's half-human son, Evan, and the mystery plot has stalled while we detour into a long explanation of Evan's peculiar and often painful history. We're better than halfway into the book before events start moving properly again—and by that time, they're not the same events. The original kidnapping case has been disposed of, and Evan himself is a target. But just as that plot line starts gaining momentum, a minor earlier mystery suddenly resurrects itself, only to give way to a complicated series of hostage-takings. Eventually, it turns out that virtually the entire plot has been a series of diversions and distractions—and that not even Badad's and rival Omage's masters control all of the forces in play.

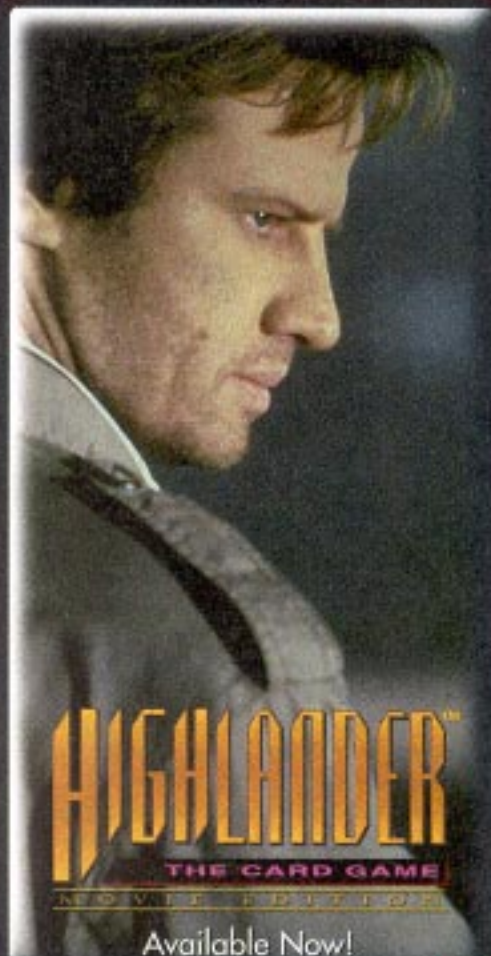
While Bacon-Smith's character development is more coherent than this mad caucus race of a plot, it's not enough to save the novel all by itself. Badad and his "cousin," Lirion, don't get enough onstage time to be well-drawn, and much too little of that shows the extraplanar duo interacting with ordinary humanity. And while Evan gets more

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narrative attention, most of his time is spent either in personal reflection or in dealing with supernatural folk of one sort or another. There are almost no human characters in the book who aren't pawns of one occult faction or another, and all the exceptions save one are either walk-on players or cannon fodder.

The result is that the reader has very little context in which to place Bacon-Smith's characters. Though the setting is nominally present-day Earth, little that happens in the novel has anything to do with Earth's mortal inhabitants. And that makes it very hard to be comfortable with any of the books cast, heroes and villains alike.

Eye of the Daemon's sole redeeming feature is its intriguing cosmology. According to Bacon-Smith, though Badad and Lirion maintain an independent existence, they're also components of a collective entity known as Ariton. Likewise, their rival Oimage is part of the host of Azmod, and there are other hosts and other minion-daemons active on the non-Earthly plane. Daemons in this cosmos are inherently neither good nor evil; their allegiances tend to shift along with those of their hosts. And there are other powers as well, though these are little-known and even less well understood.

If Bacon-Smith had been writing a gaming supplement, this fascinating milieu might be enough to warrant a recommendation. But as part of a novel, it isn't sufficient to counterbalance the unsuccessful plotting and self-referential characterization. Despite the authors best efforts, *Eye of the Daemon* just doesn't live up to the promise of its riveting cover art.

Vision Quests

Dawn Albright and

Sandra J. Hutchinson, eds.

Angelus Press

\$9.95

Indian legends were an interest of mine long before it became politically correct to say "Native Americans." When word came of an SF/fantasy anthology devoted to Indian lore, the combination was too intriguing not to investigate. For the most part, *Vision Quests* proves to be worth the seeking. Though it's a slim volume, containing just seven stories and a short poem, editors Dawn Albright and Sandra J. Hutchinson have assembled a challenging and diverse group of tales focusing on the powers and perils of native shamans.

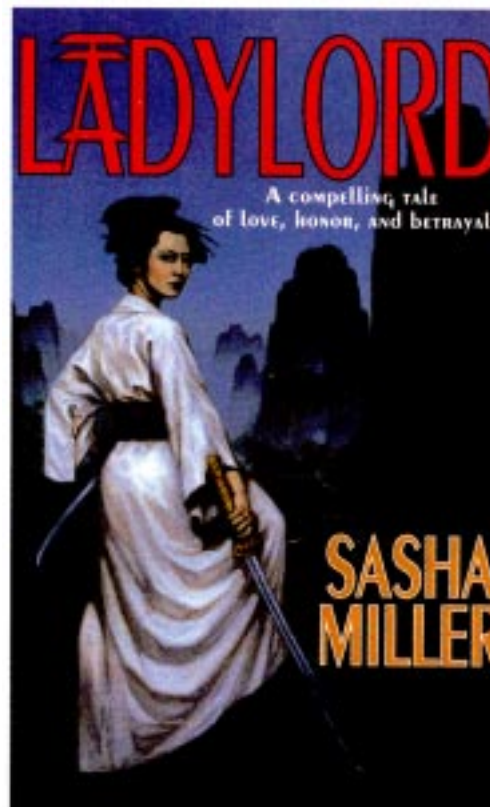
Two of the stories have been previ-

ously published: Susan J. Kroupa's "The Healer" and "The Year of Storms" from Judith Berman. Kroupa's tale well deserves the Writers of the Future award it received; it's a compelling near-future account of two individuals whose powers are both alike and different, and Kroupa captures the Southwestern atmosphere convincingly. Berman's is a long, odd story that crosses Northwest Coast tribal motifs with a plot reminiscent of the grimmer Grimm's folktales. "The Year of Storms" is skillfully told, and Berman has strong academic credentials in Northwest Coast studies, but culturally it comes across as a crossbreed rather than a purely Indian tale.

The books original entries range across the American West and Southwest for source material. K.D. Wentworth's "The Turquoise Horse" presents a straightforward yet vivid mythic story drawn from Southwestern traditions, although a present-day element frames the tale. David Niall Wilson, writing in a darker vein, dips into history with a story woven around part of the famous Little Bighorn military disaster. The specific setting of Dianne de Avalle-Arce's "Range Wars" is less clear (one clue suggests rural California), but the story is a sly, sharply realized account of modern reservation politics countered by an inspired bit of supernatural trickery. Avalle-Arce's tone is down-to-earth yet playful, neatly echoing that of many authentic legends; hers is possibly the books most successful contribution.

The remaining two stories are harder to like. Vol Ranger's "Blood Brotherhood" is the one non-American tale in the book, focusing instead on the nomads of the Mongolian steppes, and though its crisply told, its unrelievedly stark mood is a bit overpowering. And Charlee Jacobs "A Quantum Shaman for Her Time" is out-and-out weird. The science-fictional premise is clever enough, but Jacob's handling of the idea seems uneven and a trifle forced.

For the most part, though, *Vision Quests* is an intelligent and well-chosen compilation of shamanic tales. It's also a solid debut volume from new small publisher Angelus Press, and it bodes well for the quality of future titles. Gamers whose campaigns make use of tribal cultures and shamanic magic should find the volume well worth acquiring. (Those who can't persuade their local booksellers to order the book may contact Angelus Press at 7 St. Luke's Road, Allston, MA 02134.)



Ladylord

Sasha Miller

Tor

\$24.95

It isn't exactly Oriental fantasy, as the realm of Monserria does not precisely duplicate either medieval Japan or imperial China. But Sasha Miller's *Ladylord* has the tone and culture of the mysterious East in its bones, and those who've been waiting too long for a new novel from Barry Hughart should be more than satisfied with Miller's tale of high adventure mixed with a host of sensual and political intrigues.

There are five provinces in Monserria, with five lords to rule them in a strict hierarchy of rank and tradition. But the dying Third Lord Qai has a problem: he has no male heir to succeed him. He does, however, have a talented daughter — but in order to pass the reins of power to her, he must declare Javerri his "son," as women cannot normally inherit titles. Even with her father's blessing, however, Javerri finds law, custom, and a host of eager rivals arrayed against her as she attempts to claim her legacy.

For all that Monserria is an invented milieu, Miller capably invests it with the combination of ornate grace and infinitely complex bureaucracy characteristic of the Orient. There are shadow-eyed courtesans, wily military tacticians, ambitious barons, and inscrutable sorcerers,

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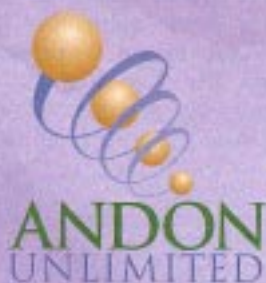
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all seeking to secure their places in Monserrian society in the wake of Javerri's disruption of the old order. At the same time, Miller offers a briskly paced tale of high adventure, as Javerri's quest takes her beyond Monserria's borders in search of a dragon's egg. Here the novel departs from Oriental tradition, as Miller's dragons are smaller and more reptilian than most, though no less fierce and dangerous. Treachery and violence grow more direct in the dragons' desert territory, though there are allies to be found there as well. One strong distinction between *Ladylord* and most other recent Oriental fantasy tales is its treatment of spiritual matters. Unlike Barry Hughart, for example, Miller doesn't extend her narrative to include godly visitations or travels to heavenly lands. That gives Miller's story a different, more intimate sense of scale — not a weakness by any means, but a quality that sets the book apart. The book is also quite mature in certain respects; though their language is mostly oblique, Miller's characters are remarkably frank on matters of sex.

With its diverse catalogue of virtues, a generalization about *Ladylord* might seem difficult to reach — but in fact, that's not the case. What Sasha Miller delivers throughout the novel is highly skilled and meticulous craftsmanship. Just as Oriental art is often exemplified by fine detail work, Miller's story consists of many small elements carefully arranged into an elegant whole.

Recurring Roles

The Silver Gryphon (DAW, \$21.95) continues a trend in Mercedes Lackey's and Larry Dixon's "Mage Wars" series; it's a smaller, more compact story than either of its predecessors. Second-generation protagonists Silverblade and Tadrith are on their way to a remote sentry outpost when a magical disruption causes them literally to fall out of the sky, stranding them in a dangerous and unexplored jungle. Lackey and Dixon tell the tale smoothly and well, but those used to world-

threatening crises from this team may be disappointed by the relatively mundane menace of this book.

Also from the Mercedes Lackey brain trust comes *Lammas Night* (Baen, \$5.99), an anthology edited by Josepha Sherman whose stories are all spun off from one of Lackey's many song lyrics with a lady-or-the-tiger ending. Most of the tales are competently told, and a few (notably from Sherman herself, Susan Schwartz, Diana Paxson, and Elisabeth Waters) are more than that. But too many simply reprise the ballad's plot by rote, giving the collection a repetitive quality.

A generally friendlier anthology is *Distant Planes* (HarperPrism, \$12.00), the second collection of short stories from the realms of *Magic: the Gathering**. As with the novels, this volume generally improves on its predecessor; especially noteworthy are the comic tales from Jane M. Lindskold and Sonia Orin Lyriss. (Now I need to find a Granite Gargoyle card in order to read the flavor text...)

While David Weber's fans wait for the next Honor Harrington novel, they'll do well to pick up *Heirs of Empire* (Baen, \$5.99). Though nominally third in a separate sequence, the book stands alone quite well as a two-pronged tale, half a spy thriller and half a lively martial adventure wherein a group of stranded interstellar warriors must conquer an entire continent in order to call for rescue.

On the flip side, *The Cup of Morning Shadows* (DAW, \$5.99) shouldn't be tackled by readers unfamiliar with Rosemary Edghill's previous book in her "Twelve Treasures" cycle — and even those readers should be warned that this second book in the sequence ends with all manner of plot threads hanging in mid-air. Edghill's blend of high fantasy and stark, often bleak characterization is still compelling, but this is clearly a segment of a larger tapestry, and its true scope isn't yet firmly established.



John C. Bunnell lives in an apartment where the books outnumber the dust-bunnies fifty-to-one. Correspondence regarding "The Role of Books" may be addressed to him at 6663 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy. #326, Portland, OR 97225-1403.

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Cons

Continued from page 51

Connie Willis. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: exhibits and a charity raffle. LA Con III, 4557 Rueda Drive, San Diego, CA 92124.

Gateway 16 August 30-Sept. 2

CA

LA Airport Wyndham Hotel, Los Angeles. Events: role-playing card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers, seminars, and an auction. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Strategicon, 333 N. San Fernando Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502.

Mage Con South XI August 31 -Sept. 2

IA

Sioux City Hilton, Sioux City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments and an art show. Registration: varies. M.A.G.E., P.O. 114, Sioux City, IA 51250.

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**NOT JUST ANOTHER
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Network NEWS

by Scott Douglas

One of the best benefits of RPGA® Network membership is *POLYHEDRON®* Newszine. The Newszine is a unique periodical — since its first issue, it has been written entirely by Network members.

Many members like to write; some have developed a reputation for writing well. Ed Greenwood — a 1981 charter member — has been contributing one of the Newszine's most popular features for over 10 years. His monthly "Elminster's Everwinking Eye" describes the travels of a certain Sage of Shadowdale. Newszine readers have joined Elminster on trips discovering the wonders of places like Turmish, Mulmaster, the Vast, and Maskyr's Eye. Elminster is even now writing about his adventures through the Border Kingdoms, the region north of the Shan in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting.

Roger Moore, who joined the Network in 1987, provides helpful hints to those who have designed their own campaign in his "World of Your Own" column. A game designer of long experience and former *DRAGON®* Magazine editor, Roger is currently discussing for Newszine readers the possibilities and challenges of developing an Elizabethan-

age based AD&D® game. He has recently discussed Underdark campaigns, as well as a magi-technical contemporary Earth game setting.

FASA designer Lou Prosperi is another member contributor (class of 1990). A primary developer of FASA's *Earthdawn** game line, Lou has written articles about the Networks Threads of Legend campaign for *Earthdawn*. This month, however, Lou gives Network readers inside information about the presidential election campaign — in the America of 2056 — a presidential campaign featured in FASA's new Super Tuesday accessory for the *Shadowrun** game. Lou is also one of the Networks guests of honor at this year's GEN CON® Game Fair.

Eric Boyd, another member who joined in 1990, has been writing a column for the Newszine since 1994. "Forgotten Deities" details divine powers in the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign. Eric's attention to detail caught the eye of TSR's resident Realms guru, Julia Martin. As a result, many of Eric's descriptions appear as part of the popular *Faiths and Avatars* accessory for the AD&D game.

Many other members have written articles for the Newszine as well. And since Network members tend to have

disparate tastes, we receive a wide variety of submission topics. In just the last year, the Newszine has published articles on *Earthdawn*, *Torg**, *Everway: Star Wars: AMAZING ENGINE®*, and *Shadowrun*. Members have been treated to features on the RAVENLOFT® campaign setting, the *DRAGON DICE™* game, the *BIRTHRIGHT®* campaign accessories, and a special sneak preview of the forthcoming *DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE™* role-playing game.

One favorite subject for members is the Networks exclusive *LIVING CITY™* campaign. For almost 10 years, members have written articles describing locations in the city of Ravens Bluff. Now the most thoroughly detailed fantasy city ever developed, the *LIVING CITY* is the world's largest on-going AD&D game. Smithies and stables, bakeries and breweries, taverns, temples, and tattoo parlors, each mapped and keyed, including literally hundreds of well-detailed non-player characters. Such a wealth of material lends itself well to use in tournament play, or in your home game.

The Networks other tournament settings also provide diverse writing (and reading) opportunities. Based on the *Masque of the Red Death* expansion for the RAVENLOFT setting, the *LIVING DEATH™* campaign is across a backdrop of gothic mystery, a place where intelligence and street-savvy are far more penetrating weapons than are stilettos or sabres. The *LIVING JUNGLE™* campaign, set in the FORGOTTEN REALMS plateau of Malatra, is a low-magic, high adventure setting, where characters battle for survival against the forces of nature, fearsome warrior tribes, ferocious jungle predators, and terrible thunder lizards, or *garuda*.

Over the years, hundreds of Network members have contributed adventures, non-player characters, magical items and spells, convention announcements, classifieds, art, and photos to their *POLYHEDRON* Newszine. It's a periodical that has truly grown up with its readership. Every time a new member joins, the Network gains a potential new author. Could that next new contributor be you?



Scott Douglas hasn't made cappuccino for anyone in the periodicals department for very nearly a year, so we have nothing good to write about him this month.

The ROLE PLAYING GAMES ASSOCIATION Network

The RPGA® Network is a 9,500-member group whose common interest is the advancement of the role-playing hobby. Members write, play, and gamemaster events at conventions and hobby stores across North America and around the world.

While originally founded in 1981 as the AD&D® game fan club, the Network embraces tournament games in over 30 game systems. There's still a pretty fair interest in the AD&D game, too.

For more information about the Network, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, or e-mail rpgahq@aol.com.

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Tales of the Fifth Age



Mirta's God

by Mark Anthony

*Artwork by
Terry Dykstra*

9 SE:

At last the clerics left their shattered temples and charred shrines, setting out across the broken face of Ansalon. They searched for some sign — any sign — of the gods who had forsaken them. Instead they found danger, hardship, and sights of dark wonder...

— from the *Chronicles of Nathal*, compiled in SE 31

The old cleric was dead.

Mirta watched as two of the village men lowered his body — still and frail as a sleeping bird — into the shallow grave. The furrow was barely deep enough for its purpose, but the men had been able to dig no further into the hard, sun-baked soil with their wooden shovels. Dull silver waves of heat rose from the barren plain. The villagers wiped sweating brows with rough, homespun sleeves. Summer had only just come to northern Solamnia, but already the weather had grown oppressive. Of them all, only Mirta did not notice the stifling air. Inside she felt cold as winter. Tanar had been her only friend. She had no one now.

Silence hung heavily over the plain. No one wept for the old priest. No one except for Mirta. She knelt beside the grave, smoothing white robes, white beard, white hair. One last time she gazed on the face of the man who had been her father, in spirit if not in blood, trying to memorize the gentle features. Behind her, the villagers stared with blank expressions. There were no prayers to speak, no ceremonies to perform, no holy rites to observe. Such things had died with Tanar.

It had been nine years since the flames of Chaos had swept across the face of Krynn. Nine years since the gods had abandoned the world they created.

Just as the first did three centuries ago, the Second Cataclysm had struck without warning. The land cracked. The sea boiled. Fire and ash rained from the sky. The stars burned to black cinders, and the heavens went dark — only to brighten again as strange constellations appeared, taking the place of the old. When a new day finally dawned, those who had somehow survived crept from their hiding places and gazed upon a world that was. . . different.

For a time the humans of Krynn wandered, dazed and wounded. They called out to their gods, but the calls went unanswered. Perhaps, some thought, the gods had been driven back by the fires of the Chaos. But if so, then surely they would soon return. In time, the people began to piece their broken lives back together. They built anew their temples. Yet still the gods were silent. Prayers were dust on the tongues of the clerics. The power of healing had fled their hands. A few whispered that the gods had sacrificed themselves to save Krynn from the fire and shadows that had threatened to consume it. But most simply believed that the gods had forsaken them. They shook their fists at the sky, cursing Paladine and Gilean and Takhisis. Some even began to claim that there never had been any gods at all.

Mirta remembered little of the Chaos. What she did were fragments: flame, smoke, fear. Lost and stumbling through burnt ruins, she had cried out for

her parents, but they never answered. They had abandoned her as surely as the gods had Krynn. Then the smoke had swirled. A tall form in white robes had appeared before her. Strong arms had encircled her, and a gentle voice had soothed her terror. She had lived with Tanar from that day.

Until now.

A hot, gritty wind sprang out of nowhere, whipping across the plain, stinging eyes and scouring flesh. Mirta staggered away from the grave, covering her face. The two men flung hurried shovelfuls of dirt into the pit, concealing the white robes forever. The villagers turned away and started back across the plain. They muttered as they went, making no effort to keep Mirta from hearing their words.

"It's good riddance, I say. Him and all his prattling about gods."

"The old man was mad. Or a fool. Or both."

"Aye, look what all his prayers have gotten us. There is no rain. The crops wither in the fields. Fever takes our children. Death and dust: those are the only gods left. . ."

The villagers moved out of earshot, returning to the distant cluster of stone hovels. Mirta sighed. She did not know what to think about the gods. But she did know that Tanar had never stopped believing in them.

"Where are the gods, Mirta?"

The old cleric always asked her the question when she least expected it, his faded blue eyes sparkling. Each time she just shook her head. She thought it a joke of his. Until one day he answered the question for her. He thrust a crooked finger at her chest, his bearded mien solemn. "They are here Mirta. This is where the gods live now. Do you understand me?"

But she did not. Everyone knew that if there really were gods, they would live in the sky. Still, it had been enough for her that Tanar had believed. Only now he had abandoned her, just like her parents, just like the gods. Without his faith, she felt utterly empty. What did she believe in? Anything? Mirta did not know. She hung her head. The wind tangled her brown hair and snatched at the plain, ash-gray shift she wore. She wished it could just blow her away.

"What's this? Nowhere to go, Mirta?"

She jerked her head up at the sound of the sneering voice. He had watched from a distance as they buried the cleric. Now he stood before her, a short, brutish man with a pock-marked face. He was clad in rusty, ill-fitting armor, but whatever he styled himself, he was no knight.

Mirta gazed past him. She tried to keep the trem-

bling from her voice. "What do you want, Darthis?"

He scratched a black, scraggly beard. His beady eyes gleamed with dull interest. "I think you know exactly what I want."

Darthis took a rattling step forward. The armor was mismatched, pilfered from a dozen different corpses. A crown marked each of the bracers, while a death lily was emblazoned upon the dented breastplate. The first was a symbol of the legendary Knights of Solamnia, the other an emblem of the evil Knights of Takhisis. Tanar had told Mirta tales of how the knights light and dark — once mortal enemies — had banded together in the Chaos War to fight for Krynn. However, she knew Darthis cared nothing for the fallen knights whose armor he wore. He thought the armor made him look dangerous. And in so thinking, he became dangerous indeed.

Darthis loomed over her. "There's no one to take care of you now, Mirta. You've made no friends for yourself by remaining loyal to that idiot cleric. The villagers think you're as mad as he was. Right now they're off to burn his house. They're fools, of course. A lot of bleating sheep. I'm going to master them all." A leering grin cut across his face. "But a lord needs a wife. . ."

Mirta shivered despite the heat. She turned her back, started to walk away.

A rough, dirty hand clamped around her throat from behind, stopping her. His breath stank. "Walk away now, Mirta," he hissed in her ear. "But you'll come begging back to me. And you won't find me so gentle when you do."

With a cry she broke free of his grip and ran across the dusty field. His mocking laughter followed her.

"Don't hold your breath waiting for his precious gods to save you, girl. They're as dead as he is!"

Mirta ran on, blinded by tears.

At last she left the laughter behind. She came to a halt, and only then did she realize where she had run. The old shrine on the edge of the village. Tanar had done what he could to keep up the once holy place. But the stone walls had been cracked by fire, and the roof was in dire need of thatching. Once a clear spring had bubbled up in a small pool before the open door, but it had gone dry long ago. All that remained were rocks and stinging nettles. Mirta sat on the front step of the shrine and hugged her knees. What was she to do? Much as she loathed him, Darthis was right. She had no one to help her now.

A silvery glint among the nettles caught her eye. Mirta reached down, careful not to scratch herself, and drew out the object. It was a medallion attached to a fine silver chain. She rubbed away dirt and tarnish with the hem of her shift. There was a

picture on the medallion. Long ago, she had seen a similar drawing in one of Tanar's books. It was a symbol of one of the lost gods. Which of them, she did not know. It did not matter. For as she stared at the medallion, a thrill surged through her. Mirta knew what she had to do.

She would search for Tanar's gods.

They could help her. They had to. And maybe, just maybe, she could bring back proof that they existed. Then the villagers would have no choice but to believe. They wouldn't mock Tanar — or her — any longer.

Resolved, Mirta stood and wiped away her tears. She slipped the medallion around her neck. Now a new problem cut through her exhilaration. No one had seen any signs of the gods since the Second Cataclysm. Where was she to look for them? Her gaze rose to the jagged, purple shapes that hovered on the horizon. The mountains. Of course. Had not the gods dwelled in the heavens? Certainly the closer she got to the sky, the more chance she had of finding them.

Without another thought, Mirta set out across the windswept plains to find Tanar's gods.



She was thirsty. So thirsty.

For hours Mirta walked across the arid plain, but the knife-edged peaks grew no larger. They shimmered and danced on the horizon, until she wondered if they were simply a trick of light and heat. It had been foolish to leave in such haste, without food or water. Still, driven by her need to prove Tanar right, she struggled on. At last, as the sun sank behind her, she reached the jumbled feet of the mountains. Following a faint trickling sound, she discovered a thin thread of moisture seeping out of a crack in the rocks. The water was warm and oily, but she drank as much as she could. Then she curled up in a crevice and fell asleep as strange, cold stars appeared in the onyx sky.

She awoke at dawn, limbs stiff, tongue parched and swollen. Craning her neck, she gazed up at the dark slopes that rose before her. She drank a few mouthfuls of the bitter springwater. Then, with a deep breath, she began climbing. She had thought it would be cooler in the mountains. It was not. Sunlight glanced relentlessly off black stone. Gorges that had once carried rushing torrents were now choked with dust and thorns. Again and again she slipped, slicing shins and palms on razor-sharp edges. Soon she hardly remembered her reason for coming here. Still she climbed, drawn by the beckoning spires that soared above her, until she slipped

into a hazy world of pain, and heat, and terrible, terrible thirst.

Mirta blinked. For a long moment she stared uncomprehending, then all at once she returned to her senses. She stood on a narrow shoulder of stone. Above her rose one final horn of blasted rock. Beyond that was only hard blue sky. Turning around, she gazed the way she had come. A gasp escaped her. The plains were a dull brown sea far below. She turned back and gazed again at the final summit. It was like a dark tower, its near vertical sides a jumble of obsidian shards as sharp as glass. She could climb no higher. Yet it seemed that she stood in the heart of the sky. Surely the gods could see her here.

Mirta thrust her arms toward the heavens. She called out those few names she knew. The sounds were strange on her blistered lips.

"Gilean! Kiri-Jolith! Sirrion!"

She closed her eyes, waiting. The wind snatched at her brown hair and ashen shift. That was all. Again she called out the names, and again. She chanted the words. Sang them. Shouted and whispered them in turn. Her voice grew ragged. The metallic taste of blood spread across her tongue. Still she called out. However, just as when she was a child lost in the smoking ruins, there was no answer.

At last she lowered her aching arms. Bleak despair descended upon her heart. Of course there was no answer. The villagers were right. All these years, Tanar had believed in a lie. There were no gods.

Mirta thought she would weep, but instead bitter laughter escaped her. She felt weak, dizzy. The air was thin so high in the mountains. The blazing sun crisped her skin. She noticed then a dark hollow in the side of the mountain. The mouth of a cave. Stumbling over loose rocks, she reached the shadowed opening and huddled just inside. At least here she could sit out of the sun while she decided what to do next. Except that, as she sat knees to chin, she could think of nothing. Her heart felt as hard as the stones around her. There was nothing left for her.

Suddenly a thought struck Mirta. At first it was dreadful, but then a strange, almost comforting resignation spread over her. Yes, there was only one thing left for her. She would return to the village. She would marry Darthis. Much as she hated him, he was all she had.

She almost stood then, almost started back down the mountain, to journey back across the burnt plains and tell Darthis he could have her hand. Almost.

That was when she felt it.



Mirta froze. It radiated from the blackness of the cave behind her. Fear. Fear so thick it pulsed on the dark air like something alive. The reek of it filled her lungs and paralyzed her mind. A slithering noise hissed against stone. Somehow she turned her head and gazed deeper into the cave. There. Something stirred amid the blackness. A single point of crimson light appeared in the dark.

"Come closer," rasped a deep, hideous voice.

Mirta's jaw dropped, but only a low, strangled sound escaped her. She could not move. Fear turned her muscles to water. Again came the slithering noise. The crimson spark lurched nearer. She caught the dim outlines of something in the cave. Something dark. And sinuous. And large.

"Now this is queer sight," hissed the voice. "A human child, sitting on my doorstep. But fortune smiles today. So young she is, so sweet." The voice became a chalky croon. "Come, my child. You have climbed so far, and in such heat. Come, step into the coolness of the dark. . ."

Before she knew what she was doing, Mirta found herself standing. She nearly took a step into the cave. However, just then her hand brushed the medallion that rested against her throat. Her fingers closed around the cool metal. The dread compulsion receded a fraction, and she halted on the threshold.

"What... what are you?" she croaked.

An edge of annoyance crept into the vast voice.

"What do you think I am?"

Mirta started to shake her head. Then an idea occurred to her. A great, terrible, wondrous idea. She licked her cracked lips. "Are you...are you a god? I've come looking for them, you see, to bring back proof to my village."

The thing in the cave seemed to hesitate. "Ah, now I understand why you shouted those names," it mocked then. "Fool child. You will not find them here."

Mirta bowed her head in dejection. "Then I have failed."

The crimson spark brightened, narrowing to a thin, blood-red slit. "No, human child," the voice thrummed through her. "You have not failed. For I am a god!"

A wave of dread and awe washed over Mirta. The power of those words drove her to her knees. She dared not doubt them. Nor did she. At last, after a long pause, Mirta found the bravery to speak again. "The others . . .," she gasped, "the others in the village said that the gods had abandoned us."

The voice curled out of the cave, almost gentle now, enfolding her. "I will never abandon you, child."

The words pierced her heart like arrows. She bowed her head. How could the voice have known?

Ah, but it was a god, was it not?

"What is your name, child?" the voice asked.

"Mirta," she somehow managed to say.

"Listen to me, Mirta. I am a generous god. I will give you that which you crave." There was a wet, tearing sound. Then something flew out of the darkness. It landed with a clink on the stones at Mirta's feet. She gazed down. It was nearly as long as her forearm, curved like a sickle, and as black as obsidian. A talon.

"Here is your proof, Mirta. I give it to you — a piece of my own body. When others gaze upon it, they will know something of that awe you feel now in my presence. And they will believe. Power will be yours."

Mirta stared at the talon, then started to bend to pick it up.

"Wait!" the voice commanded. "There is one thing I require of you in exchange for this gift. You must serve me and no other. Take off that foul medallion you wear. It is a symbol of another god. One of the cruel and evil gods who abandoned you."

Mirta started to remove the medallion, then halted. The villagers had set fire to Tanar's house. She had nothing to remind her of him, of his love. Only this. Her fingers tightened around the cool metal.

Anger edged into the voice in the cave. "I am a generous god, Mirta. But I am a jealous one as well. Take it off!"

Mirta hesitated a moment more. Then she tore off the medallion and flung it away. Tanar had abandoned her. Why should she not do the same?

She sighed. Now that she had removed the medallion, she did not know why she had struggled with it so. A few last doubts echoed dimly in her mind — Had Tanar known of this god? He had never spoken of a deity with claws — but they quickly fell silent. Darkness seemed to flow out of the cave and coil around her. It was cool and smooth as silk, protecting her from the blistering heat of the sun.

"Now, Mirta, your god hungers," hissed the voice. "Bring him an offering. A rabbit or a lizard will do. For a start..."

Mirta bowed her head. It was so easy to speak the words, and it gave her pleasure to do so.

"Yes, my lord."



The creature in the cave laughed softly to itself. Jade was its name. Dark, saurian, broken yet alive, and seething with evil.

"Your god hungers. . ."

Jade repeated the words with a rumbling chuckle, then crunched the last bones of the small animals the foolish human had brought to him. The green dragon grinned in the deep blackness of the cave, his one remaining eye glowing with wicked delight. He was pleased with the cleverness of his plan. It would have been simple to compel the human girl to walk into the cave, within easy reach of his jaws. The dragonfear he radiated had made her will his own. However, she would have made but one meal. Instead, his prudence in sparing her would gain him food for many years to come.

Like many other green dragons, Jade had not fought in the Chaos War. The Dark Queen, Takhisis, had favored the blues as mounts for her army of dark knights. A hiss of hatred escaped Jade's maw. He had not forgotten the arrogant blue dragons he had been forced to serve under during the War of the Lance long years ago. But the Dark Queen's precious blues had done her little good. The Knights of Takhisis were smashed in the Chaos War. Jade had laughed when he heard the news, flying high above the land, gloating at the destruction of his loathsome kin.

His joy had been short lived. For just then the Second Cataclysm had struck. A gout of fire and molten rock had surged up from the ground below. He had been too slow to avoid it. Searing pain had engulfed him. Fire had blinded one of his beautiful eyes. Gobs of burning stone had torn through his glorious wings, rending them to shreds. He had plummeted downward, striking the top of this mountain with bone-crushing force. Yet, somehow, he had lived. He had crawled into the safe, cool dark of this cave. And here he had dwelled ever since.

Jade's wounds had healed now. But they had healed badly. He would never fly again, and he could barely hobble more than a few steps on his crippled legs. These last years he had survived by eating damp moss that grew on stones deep in the cave, and by clumsily pouncing on and devouring whatever small animals — rats, snakes, birds — happened into his lair. It was a meager, ignoble existence for so great a creature as he.

But all that was going to change.

"I am a god now," the green chortled.

The human girl believed him utterly. She would do whatever he asked. Offerings she would bring him, delicious meat to make him strong. The small creatures she had caught were a beginning. But only a beginning. After all, Jade thought, a great god deserves great sacrifices. . .

The god in the dark did not lie.

Power will be yours.

Mirta reached the village just as the fires of dawn broke over the horizon. She had made the trek across the blasted plains during the cool of night. Before the Second Cataclysm, two moons — one silver, one crimson — would have lit the way for her. Instead, she had journeyed under the wan light of a single, pale orb.

She strode into the cluster of stone hovels. The words of the god in the cave still thrummed in her ears, and a strange heat surged in her veins whenever she gripped the talisman he had given her. Before she left the mountain, she had used the talon to hunt offerings for the god. It had been easy. Strange power radiated from the onyx claw. Once they saw it in her hand, the animals — rabbits, foxes, a small antelope — had not run from her. Rather, they had stood wide-eyed, quivering, until she used the serrated edge to take their lives. She had cut off one of the antelope's horns and had bound the talon to it with sinews. Now it rested at her hip like a dark, curved knife.

The villagers were stirring, leaving their ramshackle houses to begin the day's hard labor. They looked up in shock to see Mirta. No doubt they thought she had fled the village after the death of... she searched her mind for the name, could not quite grasp it... after the death of the old man. More likely than not they had hoped she would never return. An orphan, she had always been a misfit: mocked, disdained, ignored. But she was back. A sharp smile twisted Mirta's lips. Things were going to be different now.

Had she been able to see herself, she might have known better why the villagers stared so at her. Fey light blazed in her eyes, and she carried herself with a haughty, regal bearing, more like a queen in a golden gown than a village girl in a rent and dirty smock. Filled with curiosity and a compulsion they could not name, the villagers laid down their tools and followed after her. Mirta did not look back as she walked, but she heard their footsteps behind her, and the smile on her lips deepened.

She came to a halt before a small, crack-crazed stone structure. The old shrine. Yes, this was the place where she would show them. As she gazed at the shrine, she had the feeling that she was forgetting something — someone? — but whatever it was escaped her. Nor did it matter. There were more important things to concern herself with. She halted before the door of the shrine. At her feet was the dry, weed-choked font. Turning, she found herself gazing at fifty dusty, wondering faces. The entire village had come.



There was a potent moment of silence. At last a man with iron-gray hair cleared his throat. It was Tragert, one of the village elders. He squinted at her with suspicious eyes. "What do you want, Mirta?"

She laughed. The sound of it shocked them. "Why not ask the question of yourselves, Tragert? After all, it is you who have followed me here."

Grumbles of displeasure rose from the crowd. "I told you she meant trouble," someone muttered. "She's as crazy as the old cleric," said another.

Mirta waited for the murmurs to die down. After a moment they did, and all eyes were again on her. She found she rather liked it.

"For years, we believed that the gods abandoned us," she spoke in a ringing voice. "Some of you even said that the gods were a lie, that they never existed. But you were wrong. We were all wrong. There is a god after all — a great, wondrous god — and he has not abandoned us."

For a moment everything was quiet. Then, all at once, peals of mocking laughter rang out. The villagers shook their heads and waved dismissive hands at her. Mirta felt her cheeks burning.

"I have been to the mountain!" she tried to speak over the raucous din. "I have seen him!"

The villagers only laughed more loudly. It was just like before. The scorn, the ridicule, the cruel mirth. But this time she would not stand for it. Mirta gripped the talon-knife and raised it above her head.

"Silence!"

The effect of that one word was like that of a spell, back when there had been mages on Krynn, before the Chaos, before the moons of magic had vanished from the sky, and the wizards with them. The villagers gaped in mute fear at the dark talon in her hand, awe written across their simple faces. Mirta could feel the power radiating from the talon. She did not waste it.

"I spoke with the god on the mountain," she said, her voice low now, yet heard by all. "I felt his majesty. And he gave me this talisman, that I might bring it back to show you that he — and his power — are true."

Now the others gazed at her raptly, expectantly. Mirta had the feeling that she should do something — something symbolic to crystallize this moment. But what? Before she thought of an answer, instinct took over. Kneeling, she plunged the talon into the dusty bottom of the spring.

Water welled forth.

Mirta stared in surprise. A gasp rose from the crowd. The flow grew from a trickle to a gush. Water, thick and red with silt, filled the small font and spilled over the edge like blood, moistening the parched soil.

"It's a miracle!" a woman cried. Others picked up the cry, echoing it. One of the villagers fell to his knees, then another, and another. In moments they all knelt before the old shrine, bowing their heads in reverence.

Mirta pulled the talon from the ground and stood, staring at the talisman in amazement. She had not expected this. Dimly, a part of her wondered if someone she had known once might have questioned this miracle, if he might have suggested that the spring would have flowed for anyone who had bothered to clean it out and dig through the hard crust of sun-baked clay. Then a voice called out, driving the disturbing thoughts from her mind.

"Mirta!" It was Tragert, the village elder. A mixture of fear and ecstasy twisted his wizened visage. "Mirta, you speak for the god on the mountain! Tell us — tell us what we are to do!"

Mirta's puzzled look became a smile of satisfaction. She raised her arms, as if casting a benediction on the people. Her people. They gathered close around her. All except for one man, clad in dark armor, who stood apart from the others. He watched for a moment, a look of disgust on his pock-marked face, then turned and walked away.

Enraptured as she was by the glory of the moment, Mirta did not notice.



Two days later she returned to the mountain, to tell the god of his new followers, and of the power of his gift. With her she brought offerings: a brace of geese, a joint of mutton, and a small cask of thin wine. It was all far more than the villagers could spare in these harsh times. But Mirta had said that they must favor their new deity, and as she was the prophet of the mountain god — the god who had made the spring flow once more — the villagers agreed. They gave, and gladly. As Mirta had learned that day in front of the old shrine, everyone was ready to believe again.

The bundle of offerings was heavy. By the time she reached the windswept ledge beneath the obsidian spire, her shoulders throbbed with fire. However, as she approached the cave, once more she felt the majesty flowing thickly out of the darkness, and her discomfort was forgotten.

"What have you brought me, Mirta?" spoke the voice from the blackness.

Mirta forced herself not to tremble as she approached. She was the prophet of the god, after all. "I've brought you offerings, my lord."

"Set them down. Deeper in the shadows. There. Now step away."

Mirta did as she was bade. She bowed her head, so as not to dishonor the god with her gaze. Something dry rasped against stone, and out of the corner of her eye she saw the shadows stir. There was a hideous rending sound, followed once more by the rasping noise. Then the darkness was empty again. Tentatively, Mirta took a step into the cave. The offerings were gone. Not a scrap or feather remained.

She peered into the gloom. "My lord. . . my lord is pleased?"

There was a pause. Then a single, reverberating word emanated from the abyss.

"More."

Every three days Mirta made the long, grueling trek between village and peak. She would journey there in the coolness of night, then drowse the next day in the shadows of the cave's mouth before starting back down the mountain as twilight drifted like ash from the sky. Sometimes as she walked she thought she would drop from weariness. But then she would grip the talon-knife at her belt, and she would find the strength to go on.

In all her visits to the mountain, she never saw the god. He did not leave the cave, and she herself could not venture more than a dozen paces into the dark, even when she gripped the talon-knife. Any further, and the awe become fear — thick, choking, maddening — and she would be forced to flee into the light of day outside.

Back in the village, her life was much changed. No longer was she scorned and mocked. Now she was the leader of the village, and the others did as she bade them. Under her direction, they cleared the weeds away from around the shrine and repaired the cracked walls. She created a system for rationing the gritty water of the spring, so that everyone in the village had their share to drink, and some was even left over to water the parched fields. There might be a harvest this year, if only a scant one. Things seemed brighter, if just a bit, and the villagers thanked the new god for his blessings.

Still, not all was well. And as the days passed, the miracle at the spring dimmed in the minds of the people. They wanted more.

"My lord," Mirta said one day as she stood in the mouth of the cave. She drew a deep breath, steeling her will. "My lord, my people are frightened. A fever rises from the ground at night. It takes the lives of the young and the old. My people wonder what they are to do."

There was a long moment of silence. Then the spark of crimson in the dark — which Mirta knew

now to be the eye of the god — flashed brightly. "Tell them," hissed the great voice, "that the fever strikes the families of those who displease me. Tell them that to escape the fever, they must make more offerings unto me."

Mirta stared into the dark. This answer troubled her. The god sounded almost greedy. It seemed to her that this was not how the gods had acted in the stories told to her by. . . but she could not remember who had told her the stories, or exactly what they had been about. Mirta rebuked herself. Who was she to question the will of the god? She returned to the village and told them his words.

Two days later, Tragert was dead. His family had been hardest hit by the fever. He must have done something to anger the god, the villagers had reasoned. Ignoring his sobs and protests, they tied a rope around his neck and hanged him from a tree. Certainly his death would appease the god.

As she stared at the swinging body, doubts rose in Mirta's chest. This was not what she had intended when she went searching for the gods. But surely it was for the greater good, she told herself. And it did seem that, over the next days, fewer people were struck with fever than before. Her faith renewed, Mirta continued on.

Yet still the doubts nagged her. During the hot days high on the mountain, she would sit on the lip of the cave, gazing at the world far below. Sometimes as she did, the troubling half-memories would surface in her mind. She remembered a different voice, one that was gentler than the voice in the dark. And a white robe. But then she would feel the darkness stir behind her, reaching out, enfolding her. Warm, bitter breath caressed her neck, filling her nostrils, her lungs, her mind, and she forgot again what troubled her.

"More, Mirta," he whispered to her. "I require a greater sacrifice."

At last she asked the trembling question, even though she knew and dreaded the answer.

"What sort of sacrifice, my lord?"

A man, Mirta. Bring me a man."



Darthis skulked in the shadow of a building, watching Mirta with small, envious eyes.

Why, unlike the others, he did not feel the dragonfear radiated by the talon-knife, even the wizards of old might not have been able to say. Perhaps it was due to some power in the stolen armor he wore — armor that had once belonged to dragon-riding

knights. Perhaps it was simply a factor of his dull and evil mind. Whatever the reason, Darthis felt only one emotion when he gazed on Mirta. Hate.

Even as he watched, she gave a command to a group of villagers who scurried off like frightened mice.

"Mine!" he growled under his breath. "The village is supposed to be mine!"

A new emotion crept alongside his jealousy. Lust. It burned in his blood. She should be his as well. She should be the one obeying his commands. And she would be, if it wasn't for that blasted god of hers. If there even really was a god. Darthis wouldn't put it past the wench to have made the whole thing up for her gain. . .

A thought unfurled in his small mind. He stroked his oily beard. What if he were to journey to this mountain of hers? What if he were to discover that this supposed god was a fraud? He could tell the others. Then they would make him their leader. And surely they would give him the deceitful Mirta to do with what he pleased.

It was not in Darthis's nature to think something through twice. He knew which mountain Mirta claimed the god lived on — she had pointed to the distant peak often enough. She was to set out for the mountain at twilight. That gave him a head start of several hours. Wearing a nasty grin, Darthis slinked out of the village.

He had thought the journey would be easy. Mirta was just a girl, after all, and she made the trek every third day. He soon found he was wrong. The westering sun beat down on him with brutal force. His armor was like a steel oven. Sweat soaked his body and ran stinging into his eyes. Soon his skin blistered, and his tongue swelled in his mouth. Flies buzzed around him in dark swarms, crawling through chinks in his armor to bite him. He thought night would bring relief, but he was wrong again. The heat of the day rose up from the sun-baked ground to strike him again.

By the time he reached the foot of the mountain, Darthis was staggering, dizzy from heat and thirst. He was lucky, though, for he found the place where bitter water oozed from a crack in the stones and drank greedily. Necessity finally won out over pride, and he cast off the mismatched armor, stripping down to his grimy breeches. Cooler now, and refreshed by the water, his hatred for Mirta seized him once more. Darthis started up the side of the mountain.

He reached the summit at dawn.

At first he peered around with trepidation. Quickly, his courage grew. There was nothing here. Just bare stone and an old cave with a big pile of

loose rocks sitting above it. A grin split his pock-marked face. Mirta could fool the villagers, but not him. He picked up a handful of stones and started tossing them into the cave. Laughing wickedly, Darthis began to plan all the things he would do when the village — and Mirta — were his.

His laughter fell short as something burst out of the shadows of the cave. Fear strangled him, pierced his heart. The stones slipped from loose fingers. He stared upward in awe. One last thought surfaced in his dull, small mind. You've wet yourself, Darthis.

Then the massive jaws closed, ending the thought in an explosion of crimson.



Mirta ignored the burning in her lungs and kept climbing. She had found the armor scattered at the base of the mountain. It had to be Darthis's. What it portended she did not know. But it could only be ill. She forced herself on, toward the jagged summit. At last, gasping, she began to pull herself up over the final ledge.

Mirta froze, staring in horror at the grisly scene not twenty feet away.

It had crawled from the cave to feast upon Darthis. Emerald scales glistened in the sunlight, though in patches they were missing, revealing livid gray flesh beneath. The wings were hideously twisted, trailing leathery shreds of scarred skin. One side of its great, saurian head was a melted ruin. The other was smeared with blood. It grinned, an evil, lopsided expression, as it plunged its snout deeper into the corpse before it.

This was no god. This was a monster.

Mirta clamped a hand to her mouth to keep from screaming. She turned and fled, half-running, half-sliding down the steep slope. Her mind reeled. Everything she had believed was a lie. Everything. With a moan, she collapsed, falling to the sharp stones. It felt as if the thing had ripped out her heart with its bloody claws, not Darthis's. There were no gods. She was alone. Utterly alone. Mirta thought the pain of it would kill her.

Then, through her tears, she saw it. A glint of bright metal against dark stone. Reaching out a trembling hand, her fingers closed around something cool and smooth. She drew it back, opened her hand, stared. It was the medallion she had found by the old shrine, the medallion she had cast off at the dark thing's bidding. At last, as she gazed at it, the memories came flooding back, filling the

emptiness inside her with their sweet, aching warmth.

"Oh, Tanar," she whispered. "Forgive me."

A shudder passed through her thin body. Then her trembling ceased. In that moment, Mirta realized the truth. Just because someone leaves you doesn't mean they don't love you. Like her parents. Like the gods. Like Tanar. The gentle old cleric had not abandoned her. She had abandoned him. Tanar had been with her all along — his words, his love, his faith. All she had to do was remember.

Where are the gods, Mirta? His words echoed in her mind. Now, finally, she understood the answer. She gained her feet, slipping the medallion back around her neck. Then she started back up the mountain.

Nothing was left of Darthis save a few smears of blood on the rocks. The dragon had retreated back into the refuge of its cave. But she could feel it there—bloated, evil, gloating in the dark.

"You brought me a fine sacrifice, Mirta," rasped the chalky voice.

She spoke the words without emotion. "I brought you no sacrifice."

There was a confused pause. "But of course you did," the voice went on. "Who else sent the man to me? Do not fear, Mirta. Your god is pleased with the offering."

Mirta gripped the talon-knife in her hand. "I am not afraid," she said solemnly. "And you are not my god."

"What?" the voice hissed, incredulous.

"You are a shadow," Mirta answered. "Nothing

Now the voice seethed with fury. "Foolish human! No one dares insult me so." The words rose to a shriek. "I will have another sacrifice. And it shall be you!"

The darkness stirred. Hobbling on mangled legs, the dragon lurched from the cave, evil blazing in its one crimson eye. Dark spittle ran from its jaws. Terror radiated from the creature in smothering waves. Mirta started to reel backward. Then her fingers brushed the medallion at her throat, and the dragon-fear ran over her like water. With grim calm, she lifted the talon-knife and threw.

Few weapons have the power to pierce a dragon's flesh. This one did, for it was of the creature's own body. The talon-knife plunged into the dragon's breast, wounding it deeply. The creature threw back its head and let out a shrill, trumpeting cry of agony. It stumbled back, spreading its twisted wings, striking the roof of the cave. The mountain shuddered. Countless tons of loose rock slid down from the spire above, falling across the mouth of the cave, sealing

it tightly forever. The scream of the dragon was cut short. Silence descended on the summit.

The god was dead.

At last Mirta turned away from the destruction. She gazed out across the wide plain. A peace filled her.

"I understand now, Tanar," she murmured, gripping the medallion.

Everything that had happened in the village — the spring, the crops, the fever, Tragert's death — the god hadn't done those things. She and the villagers had. The power to make good and evil was their own, and no one else's. It did not matter that the gods had left Krynn. Mirta knew that now. The gods, both light and dark, had served simply to remind mortals of the thing they had, of the things they would always have inside them. Love. Hatred. Life. Death. And hope. Above all, there was always hope.

For one more silent moment, Mirta gazed at the world below. Her world. Then she started down the mountain, to bring a new message to her people.

Mark Anthony has written a number of novels for TSR, including his latest title, Escape from Undermountain, and his literary journeys have taken him to the DRAGONLANCE®, FORGOTTEN REALMS®, and RAVENLOFT® settings. With all this world-hopping, Mark recently decided to take up tai chi, in hopes of always knowing where his center is no matter what world he's in.



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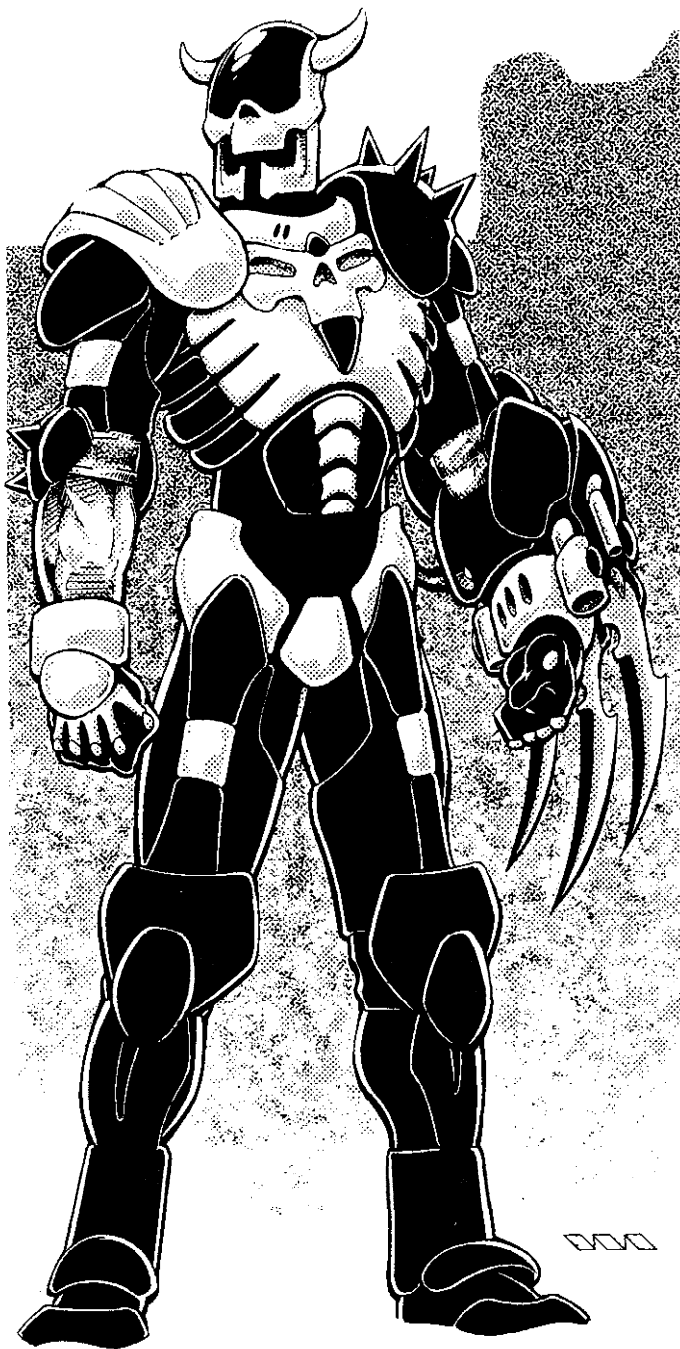
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by Carrie A. Bebris

6th-level Rjurik Bard

STRENGTH: 12
DEXTERITY: 17
CONSTITUTION: 12
INTELLIGENCE: 13
WISDOM: 14
CHARISMA: 16
AC 6
THACO 18
HIT POINTS: 28
ALIGNMENT: LN
Damage/Attack 1d6 (short sword) or 1d4 (dagger)

Bloodline: Anduiras, minor, 16.

Blood Ability: Resistance (major). Jerryl's blood ability grants her 50% immunity to wizard spells of the enchantment/charm school, priest spells of the charm sphere, and similar spell-like effects.

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, short sword, throwing knife.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Ancient history (12), etiquette (16), local history (16), musical instruments — bagpipes and lute (16), reading/writing Rjuven (14), singing (16).

Equipment: Padded leather armor, *ring of protection* +2, furs in winter, short sword, dagger, throwing knives, bagpipes, lute, scroll cases, books.

Spells (3/2): *Charm person*, *phantasmal force*, *read magic*; *invisibility*, *whispering wind*.

Bard Abilities: Climb Walls 60%, Detect Noise 40%, Pick Pockets 10%, Read Languages 55%.

Description/History: As a bard (or skald, as the Rjurik call their bards), Jerryl serves an important function in Rjurik society. Jerryl is at once an entertainer, historian, herald, and negotiator. With equal talent, she can sing ballads of epic wars or speak words that bring lasting peace. Though short (she stands only 5'6" tall) and slight in build, this young woman commands great respect and wields considerable influence.

A gifted musician, Jerryl exhibits talent on both the bagpipes and the lute. Her finest instrument, however, is her own voice: Whether singing or merely speaking, Jerryl's voice creates music that all around her crowd nearer to hear.

Jerryl spends the seasons roaming the Rjurik countryside, generally wintering in one of the Taelshore domains. Her arrival in a village or town draws smiles from the faces of regent and commoner alike, for they know she brings the latest news, tales, and songs from abroad. Jerryl can discuss with equal authority the increased military training of Stjorvik's



many clans or the new weaving method developed by the women of Halskapa. Jerryl receives warm welcomes any time of year, but especially during winter months, when Rjurik's frigid weather drives its clans into their longhouses to spend their time in handiwork, storytelling, and planning for the coming year.

Jerryl has earned the trust of many Rjurik jarls and regents but — having taken an oath of neutrality — gives allegiance to none. Though her gentle and sometimes flirtatious manner has led to speculations linking her romantically with several jarls and other eligible bachelors, Jerryl has given her heart to her music alone. She believes that romantic entanglements pose a threat to both her diplomatic and artistic integrity.

At 27, Jerryl has had few years in which to build a reputation, yet she has earned one distinction that has eluded all other skalds: Jerryl alone has garnered the favorable regard of the Siren, one of the awnsheghliens cursed with the essence of the evil god Azrai. Formerly a bard herself, the Siren has lived in virtual seclusion since shortly after becoming an awnshegh. It is said that she refused all skalds who sought entry into her domain because she could not bear to hear other voices creating music, when hers brought only pain and destruction to its listeners. Yet somehow Jerryl gained an audience with her. No one knows just what the young woman said or sang, but she is now the one skald whose song can charm the Siren.

It is also said that Jerryl is the only human on Cerilia who can listen to the Siren's song without ill effect. Folks speculate as to whether this alleged immunity derives from natural, divine, or magical means. Jerryl herself, however, has never confirmed the rumor.

The Siren respects Jerryl's neutrality and allows her to come and go as other obligations — or her wanderlust — dictate. Jerryl readily delivers any greetings or messages the Siren may send to other regents, but she reveals nothing else of the time she spends in that mysterious domain.

Keldric the Seer

by Carrie A. Bebris

9th-level Rjurik Magician

STRENGTH: 11
DEXTERITY: 12
CONSTITUTION: 11
INTELLIGENCE: 16
WISDOM: 13
CHARISMA: 8
AC 10
THACO 18
HIT POINTS: 22
ALIGNMENT: CG
Damage/Attack 1d6 (staff)

Bloodline: None.

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, staff.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Ancient history (16), astrology (15), fire-building (12), herbalism (14) read/write Rjuven (17), read/write/speak ancient Rjuven (17), read/write/speak Anuirean (17), spellcraft (14).

Equipment: Cloak, furs in winter, dagger, staff, crystal ball, scrying bowl, rune stones, divining rod, other divination devices.

Spells (4/3/3/2/1): *Change self, detect magic, know bloodline strength* (Book of Magecraft), *know Cerilian origin* (BoM); *Calder's starry sky* (BoM), *ESP, improved phantasmal force; clairaudience, clairvoyance, invisibility 10' radius; Shaelfpaete's shadowy distinction* (BoM), *minor creation; contact other plane.*

Description/History: Keldric lives alone in a cottage at the edge of a small village in Jankaping. Strange divinatory apparatus, bundles of dried herbs hanging from the ceilings, and many books crowd the cottage. It is a dwelling few enter without trepidation; indeed, children of the village dare each other merely to walk past it.

The cottage receives few visitors. The Rjurik people harbor great superstition about wizards (commanders of true magic) and seers (practitioners of lesser magic). While they accept as natural their druids' priestly magic, they consider sorcerers to be servants of the evil god Azrai. Thus, those who seek help from Keldric generally do so only in times of stress or crisis.

Keldric received his training from Jorvald, the village's previous seer. Jorvald recognized Keldric's talent when the younger seer was just a boy, telling Keldric's parents that their child had the doom (a Rjurik term akin to "curse") of second sight. Keldric's parents rejected Jorvald's words and went to great lengths to shield their son from the old man's influence.

As Keldric grew, he too rejected Jorvald's words as the mutterings of a madman. As a boy, he told himself that his premonitions and dreams were not prophetic but simply coincidental. By his midteens he hoped that if he ignored the visions they would eventually go away. Finally, at the age of 19, he went to



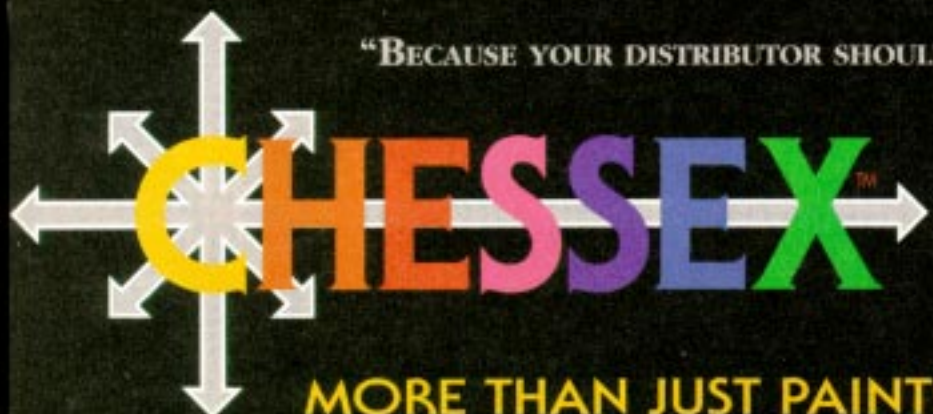
Jorvald for guidance and began his training. Keldric studied with his mentor until Jorvald's death 14 years ago, by which time the student had become a master in his own right. That was 17 years ago. Keldric is now 50.

Among Keldric's rare visitors is the province ruler himself, who comes in secret during the cover of night. The jarl believes he can't afford not to hear Keldric's words — whatever power might grant the seer's divinations, they are accurate more often than not. Keldric keeps the jarl's confidence, as he does that of all his visitors. The villagers would likely be very surprised to learn that nearly every one of them has visited Keldric at one time or another, seeking to learn anything from the gender of an unborn child to the results of a contemplated raid.

Though Keldric sometimes inadvertently divines information not requested, he keeps it to himself. He does so in part out of compassion (why tell the parents of a newborn that their child will live only a year?) and in part out of self-preservation: Keldric has been blamed more than once for causing an event merely by prophesying it.

This self-enforced code of silence taxes Keldric's spirit and mind. Foreseeing tragedies that he is powerless to prevent in the lives of his fellow villagers fills him with frustration and has made him reluctant to cultivate close friendships. And so he lives alone — physically and emotionally isolated from the community his gift commands him to serve. Those who have seen him recently say that the solitude is beginning to wear on his sanity. Keldric has become increasingly gruff and impatient with his visitors. His ordinary conversation is sometimes as cryptic as his divinations. And he seems exceptionally nervous when shadows cross his path.

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Maija Larsdotter

by Duane Maxwell

7th-level Rjurik Fighter

STRENGTH:	12
DEXTERITY:	15
CONSTITUTION:	12
INTELLIGENCE:	14
WISDOM:	14
CHARISMA:	15
AC	8 (7 when using single weapon)
THACO	14 (12 with <i>saber</i> +1)
HIT POINTS:	44
ALIGNMENT:	LN
Damage/Attack	1d6+4 (<i>saber</i> + 1)

Bloodline: Masela, major, 29.

Blood Abilities: Enhanced sense (major), blood history, unreadable thoughts.

Weapon Proficiencies: Saber (specialist), long sword, dagger, longbow, one-handed weapon style (specialist).

Non-weapon Proficiencies: Rjuven (14), swimming (13), seamanship (17), rope use (16), strategy (12), intrigue (16), speak Anuirean (14), read/write (15), Basarji (14).

Equipment: Maija rarely carries much more than her weapons and some simple outdoor survival gear, as she prefers not to burden herself. She also owns a magical *saber* +1, which she calls *Retribution*, given to her by the Khinasi merchant lord el-Hadid.

Description/History: Maija is a slender Rjurik woman of average height. She wears her blond hair very short, for in her younger days she masqueraded as a young male Rjurik warrior. Her cornflower blue eyes mirror her every mood. Maija's face shows the effects of years of hard living, both as an adventurer in southern lands and in the harsh climate of the north. An unfortunate encounter with the edge of a table in Harry's tavern in Haes left her with a small scar on her chin. Although she is not an especially beautiful woman, she possesses a self-assurance and lightness of spirit that have drawn the amorous attentions of more than one southern nobleman. She dons armor only in the most dangerous of circumstances, preferring instead to rely on her natural grace and skill with a blade to keep herself out of harm's way. She is as comfortable in the style of clothing worn in Anuire as she is in Rjurik garb.

Maija is the daughter of Lars Bodenson, a chieftain of the Thajarr, a tribe that roams the northern reaches of Svinik. Her mother, Lida, is the daughter of Jarl Ulfgrim of Innsmark. She traces her rather rare bloodline through her mother, who derived it in turn from her mother. Ever a willful child, she fought continually with her father. By the time she was old enough to decide her own fate, their relationship had deteriorated enough to cause her to seek her fortunes as far away from Svinik as she could get; she left for the south at 17. Maija



spent the next 16 years as a wandering sellsword in Anuirean lands. She was a caravan guard, a soldier in the Mhor's army, and a ship's captain for the merchant lord el-Hadid. She studied saber under the swordmaster Maruf al-Saad, and she honed her tactical abilities under Wilfred Raenard, lord marshal of the Prince of Avani. Although she will not discuss it, she was even married once, for a brief time. She returned to her ancestral lands a year ago, when messengers from her father's clan told her that her father was dying and wished to have her come home to her people. They made a sort of peace, and he passed on to her the leadership of the clan. Since her return, she has reaffirmed her ties to the ways of her people. Already one of the orog tribes of the Blood Skull Barony has learned to their cost that she is every bit her father's daughter.

Despite — or perhaps because of — her years in the south, Maija has a strong connection both to the people of the Thajarr and the lands they roam. In the short year that she has been chief, she has won her people's respect. They look to her for leadership and the defense of their ancient ways. She has successfully fought off orog raids from the Blood Skull Barony and sent packing an envoy from King Fulgar of Rjuvik, who sought to make her his bride. Although she seems enigmatic and aloof to those who do not know her, she is a true friend to those she is sworn to protect. As chief of a fairly small clan, she is very well aware of how tenuous her people's existence is, so she prefers to avoid open warfare if possible. She has shown, however, that she can be a dangerous opponent when crossed. The few travelers from other lands whom she and her tribe encounter might expect to find some hulking brute acting as the chief of the tribe. Instead, they discover that the chief of the Thajarr is a good deal more wily and erudite than expected. Maija does not hesitate to use the confusion caused by that discovery to her advantage and to the benefit of her people.

Ulfig Bjornsson

by Duane Maxwell

6th-level Rjurik Priest (Druid) of Erik

STRENGTH:	18
DEXTERITY:	10
CONSTITUTION:	15
INTELLIGENCE:	11
WISDOM:	15
CHARISMA:	11
AC	4 (studded leather, wooden shield +2)
THACO	17
HIT POINTS:	33
ALIGNMENT:	CG
Damage/Attack	1d6+2 (spear)

Bloodline: None

Special Abilities: As druid, plus the following ranger abilities: Move Silently (70%), Hide in Shadows (56%), and animal empathy (save at -3); when enraged, he gains +1 to hit, +3 damage, and +5 hit points, but may not use a shield and may attack only with melee weapons.

Weapon Proficiencies: Club, spear, hand axe.

Non-weapon Proficiencies: Rjuven (11), survival-forests (11), direction sense (16), hunting (14), weather sense (14) fire-building (14)

Equipment: Ulfig carries his magical boar spear, a club, and whatever spell components and survival equipment he needs. The boar spear is a *spear* +2, called *Witch-slayer*, which he inherited from his mentor.

Description/History: Ulfig is considered large even among the Rjurik. Standing six and a half feet tall, he weighs just over 300 pounds. Strangers among the superstitious Rjurik give him a wide berth as much for his long, shaggy black hair as for his size because they fear the dark rages commonly associated with black-haired people. His dark complexion shows the strain of his daily existence, and his blue eyes have a haunted look. He wears dark, stained leather and hide armor decorated with bronze banding. In winter, he often wears a great bearskin.

Ulfig was born 28 years ago in northern Rjuvik. His black hair was considered an ill omen by the clan's seers and midwives, but he did little to cause them any concern until he was 16. He and the jarl's son were hunting with some other of the clan's younger warriors. The jarl's son, Toorvald, began to taunt Ulfig about his black hair. The other boys joined in. Ulfig tried to laugh at first, but as the others escalated the taunts, he became angry. When Toorvald poked him with a boarspear and drew blood, something inside Ulfig snapped. He wrenched the spear out of Toorvald's hand and began to lay about him with great swings. By the time he mastered himself, his hands were badly lacerated from grasping the blade end of the spear, and young Toorvald had been beaten to death. The others, some of them injured by Ulfig's attack, fled back to the clan's



camp. Ulfig knew that the jarl would order him killed, so he ran.

Ulfig fled to the Realm of the White Witch, enemy of Rjurik, where he hoped his people would not dare to go to exact their vengeance. There, he was taken in by a small tribe living in fear and defiance of the White Witch's forces. The tribe's druid guessed the truth of his violent nature and began to teach him how to control it. He told Ulfig that he was blessed with the spirit of the bear. The bear, he explained, is normally a peaceable animal, but when stung to anger, it can cause terrible destruction. He learned more from the druid about the animals of the north. When the man died, he took up his responsibilities. He gave himself the surname Bjornsson to honor both the druid's teachings and to remind himself of his nature.

Ulfig is a simple man who bears an unfortunate curse: He is prone to berserker rages when injured or when defending something important to him (such as one of his clan members). He cares a great deal for the people he has come to regard as his own, and he works hard to help them survive against the combined forces of their harsh natural environment and the depredations of the White Witch. Despite this concern, he does not become close to anyone, for he still bears the guilt of the death of Toorvald. He is steadfast and loyal, and he shows great courage in the face of any danger. He remains unmarried, for he fears that he will pass on his curse to his children.

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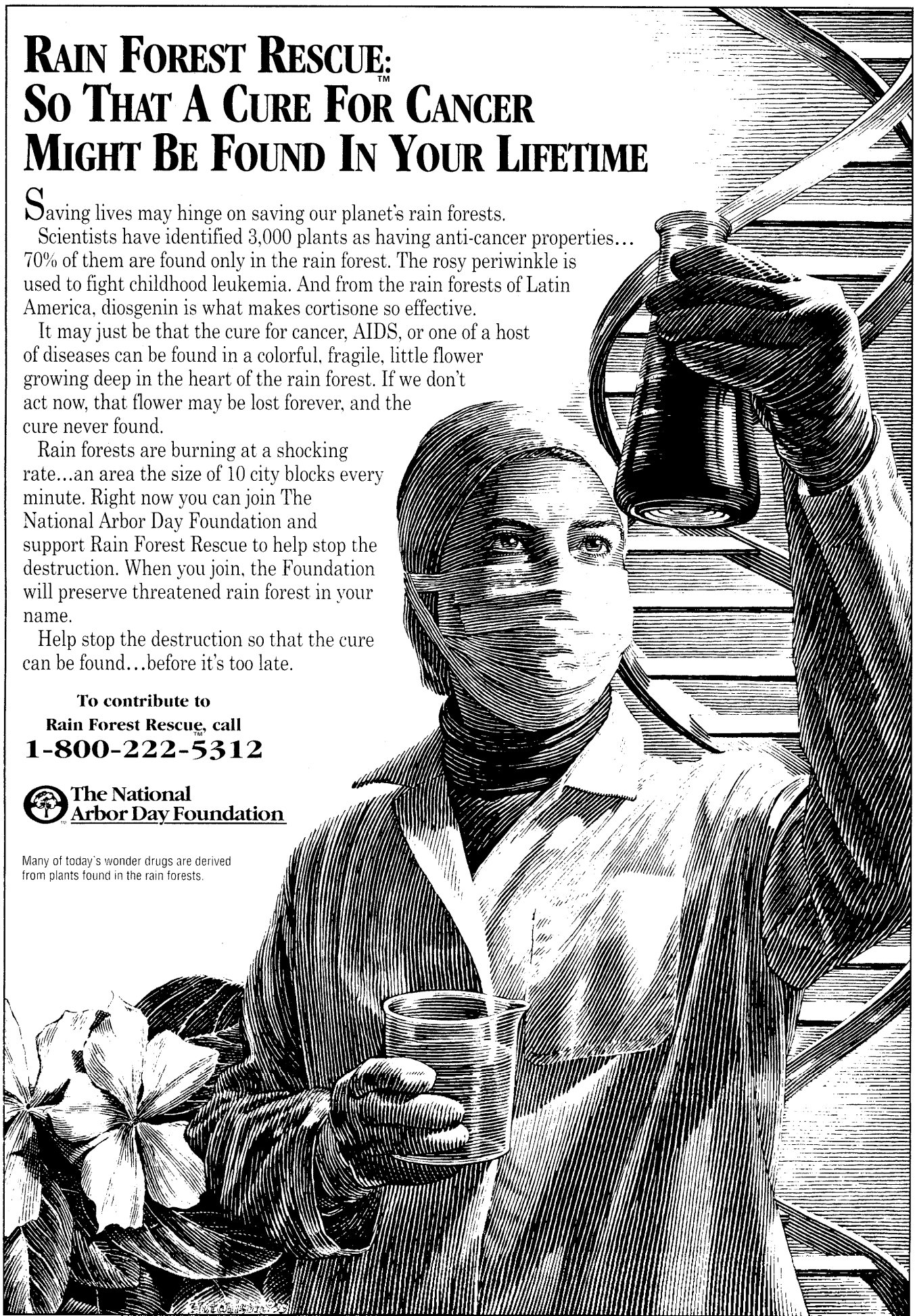
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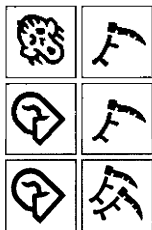
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Zombie



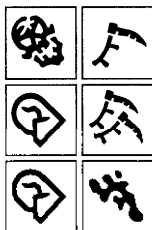
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Heavy Troop

Skeleton



Revenant



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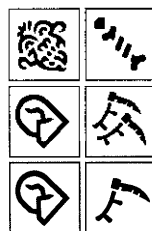


Spectre



Skirmisher

Ghoul



Ghast



Light Magic

Apparition



Heucuva



Heavy Magic

DRAGON DICE™ GAME

by Dori Hein & Bill Olmesdahl

Starting this issue, *DRAGON® Magazine* will examine the new races, and the secrets and strategies behind the armies battling for control of Esfah, the mythical world of the *DRAGON DICE™* game.

Populating this setting are races composed of the elements: dwarves of earth and fire, coral elves of air and water, and firewalkers of air and fire. But there are also other races, those that have been corrupted by death: evil lava elves, composed of fire and death, and goblins, corruptions of earth and death.

Kicker Pack #3: Undead Legions introduces a new race spawned by death: the vile undead. With their unique powers and special abilities, the undead may be the most powerful race yet introduced to the struggle for Esfah. This article explores the undead's special abilities, their new spells, and tactics you can use to add them to your existing armies.

Melee machines

Undead follow the same basic rules as do the other races in the *DRAGON DICE* game, but they have a special ability that makes them unique and powerful. This racial ability is *stepped damage*. Because they are not truly alive, undead can often suffer great damage before being destroyed. When an undead unit is "killed," instead of being sent to the dead unit area, it can be traded in for an undead unit of one health less. (The replacement unit must come from the dead unit area; if there are no undead units there, the die is actually killed.)

This ability works especially well with another of the undead's abilities: undead units are notoriously fierce hand-to-hand combatants. Unlike other races in the *DRAGON DICE* game, the undead have no missile icons or cavalry units. Instead, the undead have three types of melee units and two types of magical units.

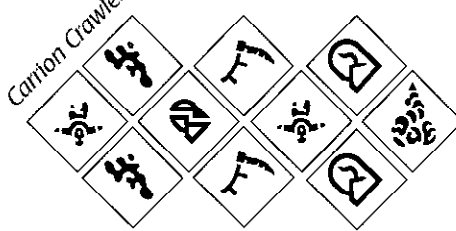
Zombies, wights, and mummies make up the heavy melee troops; **skeletons, revenants, and death knights** are the light melee troops; and **wraiths, spectres, and ghosts** are the skirmishers. Their combat skills, combined with several new special action icons, make them the ideal race to recruit if you like to bring the fight to your opponent.

Deadly spellcasters

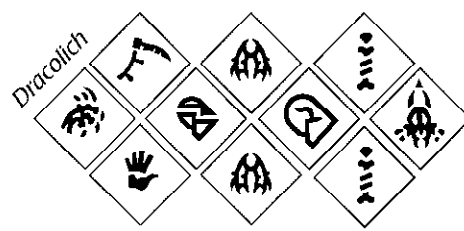
Not only are the undead formidable fighters, they're also mighty magicians. Even though they can cast only black magic, having two levels of magicians in their ranks easily compensates. Light magic troops consist of **ghouls, ghasts, and vampires**, while heavy magic troops are composed of **apparitions, heucovas, and the fearsome liches**. The light magicians combine melee and magic skills, and the heavy magicians are everything a *DRAGON DICE* player dreams of: lots of magical power in a dangerous and compact package. To counter an opponent using that strategy, the undead even have the fenhound, a monster ally that can *dispel magic*.

The undead also have a forbidding spellbook. Five new spells are available

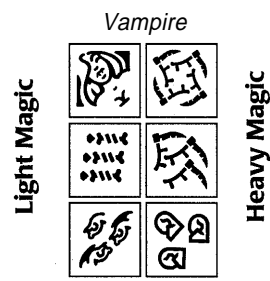
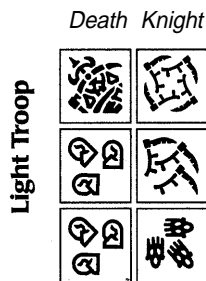
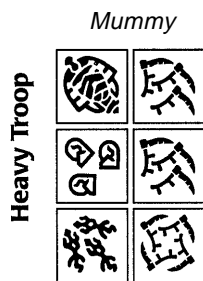
Carrion Crawler



Dracolich



RARE TROOPS



only to the undead, and these are some of the most powerful yet to be introduced in the game. The **Evil Eye** spell, for example, subtracts one from each save roll of the target army. Multiple castings affect multiple armies or increase the penalty. And **Fade** lets you choose an undead unit to become incorporeal. While that unit cannot make melee attacks, it also cannot be attacked by missile or melee. This spell can be highly useful in an underdog situation.

The most powerful spell the undead have available is **Haunt**. If you can roll enough points of black magic, your dead units (regardless of race or number) can immediately rise up and attack any army on the table! You bury any dead units killed by that army's counter-attack; any of your units not killed in the counter-attack return to the dead unit area.

Undeadly new powers

The undead have several new (and potentially lethal) special action icons, unique to their race. The new icons are as follows:

Convert: Found on the **vampire** unit, the convert icon allows you to choose a target of less health than the number of convert icons rolled. Unless the target saves, it is killed, and an undead of equal or less health is added to the vampire's army from its dead unit area.

Scare: Found only on the **death knight**, if the scare icon is rolled during melee, an equal health value of target units (chosen by you) must roll a non-ID save or immediately flee to their owner's reserves. Targets that roll an ID face are killed — that is, they die of fright!

Vanish: Appropriately enough, this icon is found only on the ghost. When

rolling for saves, each vanish icon counts as a save, and that unit may immediately move to any other terrain or its reserves — vanishing into thin air.

Wither: The last special icon is found only on the mummy. When this icon is rolled during melee, choose a target unit. Until the beginning of your next turn, the target suffers a penalty of -1 to all its rolls for each wither icon rolled. On an adjusted result of 0 or lower, it dies.

The 10-sided monsters allied with the undead also have some unique and deadly abilities. The **minor death**, for instance, can instantly slay an opponent of your choice unless it rolls its ID face (and only its ID face). This dreaded creature also carries the plague, sending a target unit back to its army to spread the deadly disease.

Tactics of the undead

With all the horrific powers at the disposal of the undead, they do have a weakness: they are slow movers compared to the other races. In fact, they can't even make charges; furthermore, multiracial armies containing undead cannot charge. Keeping this weakness in mind, here are some strategies for using the undead to best advantage.

Concentrate on your home terrain: Pick one that you think won't help any one else, since your special abilities aren't tied to a terrain. Move it quickly into either melee or magic. Missile range does you virtually no good.

Make them come to you: Move your home terrain to the eighth face, then go stomping. With your magic and melee might (not to mention the stepped damage), you can take anything your opponents can dish out, but only if you force

them to fight on your terms.

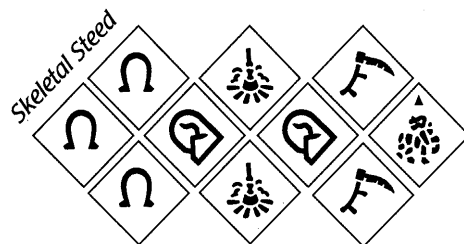
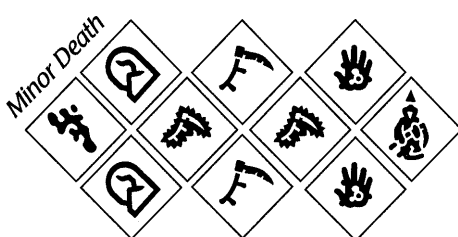
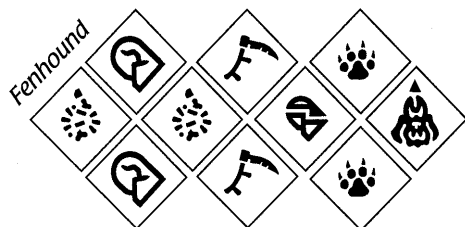
It's no fun without dice: Bury your opponent's dead whenever possible. Your troops are extremely difficult to kill, and if you bury dead whenever possible, soon you'll have a vast numerical superiority. Never, *never* bury your own dice.

Strength in diversity: For an all-undead army to succeed, you must bring to the table as many different types of dice as possible. If you have no two-health dice, your three-health dice can't take advantage of the stepped damage special ability. You must also keep something in your dead unit area for this power to be effective.

Fight your fight: Each race has its own strengths and weaknesses. You have no missile capacity and almost no movement. In exchange you have powerful new spells and a melee strength second to none. At the start of the game, move your spellcasters to your reserve area and the rest of your dice to your home terrain. Use magic generated in the reserve area to cast protective spells on your home army while they move the terrain to the eighth face. Once they've done that, move the spellcasters to your home terrain and send the rest of your army to the highest terrain on the board. Use spells to soften up any defenders, and melee them out of the terrain. In no time you'll have the second eighth face and the win.

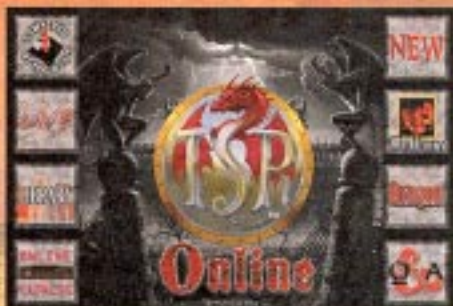


Dori Hein is the Creative Director for the *DRAGON DICE* game line and can be reached at tsrdori@aol.com. Bill Olmesdahl is both a designer and editor involved with TSR's collectible dice game.



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Tobias Hill makes a very interesting comment on thief THAC0s in issue #227. He points out a problem that nobody else seems to have noticed: namely that low-level rogues have surprisingly good THAC0s, especially at 3rd level, when their fighting ability is second only to a fighter's (*Player's Handbook*, page 91).

What happened here? The original *PHB* specifically describes the lightly armed and armored thief as fighting "only slightly more effectively than do magic-users" (page 27). The original *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* attack matrices (page 74) bear this out: a 4th-level cleric and a 3rd-level fighter are combat equals (THAC0 18) while a 4th-level thief is on a par with a 1st-level magic-user (THAC0 20). Uneven progression at higher levels results in an identical THAC0 for 9th level thieves and clerics, but the clerics permanently regain a two-point advantage immediately thereafter.

The 2nd Edition intent to simplify and smooth the progression probably has something to do with the current problem, but there is another reason. Look again at the original attack matrices, and you will find that magic-users and thieves start their careers with the equiv-

alent of what would be a 21 THAC0 under the 2nd Ed. rules (compared to 20 for the cleric and fighter). It is this mysterious "+1" bonus (a vestige of the thankfully extinct repeating 20s on the original game matrices) that is confounding Tobias' game.

If it bothers you that a 1st-level wizard or thief can fight as effectively as a 1st-level warrior (and it bothers me), the easiest way to rectify the situation is to add +1 to the rogue and wizard THAC0s up to and including the 9th level of ability. That will give a fair approximation of the original combat abilities and return a combat edge to the clerics and fighters. To be fair to the PCs, the same reasoning should be applied to monsters with less than 1-1 Hit Dice (see page 75).

**Jamie Nossal
Houston, TX**

When I was a young child (I'm now 22), I loved to play games. "Let's Pretend" was my favorite. I have an older brother (now 30) who, when I was eight, introduced me to the joys of role-playing games. I was fascinated by the way you played this game. It was like none other. At first I was allowed just to roll the dice for my brother, who was always the DM; but I listened to what they were doing and realized they were playing my favorite game ("Let's Pretend"), but they had a set of rules to go by. What I also soon realized was that the players worked together, not against each other, to reach a common goal. I was almost instantly hooked to my brother's dice.

About a year went by, and soon my brother let me read the rule book (from the Basic D&D® game), saying, "You probably won't understand most of it, but

In light of the alarming statistics of adult illiteracy, I can't help but wonder — if those adults were introduced to role-playing games as children, would they be readers now?

I'd like to ask people who think children shouldn't be introduced to gaming at young ages whether they've seen the video games and toys and TV programming that are daily bombarding our kids. Frankly, it scares me. I'd rather my nephews get involved in role-playing games than any other activity (save sports). What's wrong with wanting our children to learn to play together instead of against each other?

**Andy Farrell
Omaha, NE**

Five years ago, I was introduced to the AD&D® game and was instantly hooked. Six months later I was DMing my own campaign, which crashed and burned, by the way. I picked myself up and now I run multiple successful campaigns in the PLANESCAPE™ setting (my favorite) and home realms. I've also played GURPS* and a futuristic gaming system, but I've always come back to the AD&D game.

Even though TSR has the best system I've seen, there is room for improvement and I'd like to cover a couple of those areas.

The COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ campaign setting appealed to me in the worst way because I love dragons. One of my biggest beefs with the set is the flight proficiency, which you have to spend proficiency slots to acquire. If you don't, you can't fly. Now, let me get this straight: I'm a hatchling dragon who is being raised by all these venerable drag-

. . .if [they] were introduced to role-playing games as children, would they be readers now?

here you go." I took that as a challenge and dived right into it. I got stumped about two paragraphs into the first page, but I got out a dictionary and looked up the problem words and went from there.

Anyway, I know that because I was introduced to the D&D game so early, I have this game and my brother to thank for my love of reading and writing. Had it not been for the many hours of reading those and many other rulebooks, I don't think I would have learned to read as well as I do today.

ons, yet they never taught me how to fly? That's like saying a human was born but never learned to walk. Having to spend slots on combat flight I can understand; knowing how to walk and knowing how to fight as well as a martial artist, for example, are two entirely different things. Still, flight, for a winged creature who is around hundreds of beings just like him who can fly, should come naturally. No slots should be spent.

Another problem with CoW is that you need three books to create a

character. The information is so spread out that you're bound to miss something vitally important. This data is very disorganized and looks as though it was just slapped together to meet a quota.

Chronomancer is a cool idea, but the rules on doubling a timeline make no sense and are incomplete. They state that one month before a chronomancer is going to double his time line, a Time Storm begins. What DM (or PC, for that matter) is going to know a month ahead of time that they're going to do that? None! If a character is going to double his line, it's probably going to be a split-second decision made in the heat of game-play. Then what happens? Does a Storm just appear out of nowhere? And so this Storm pulls the time wizard into Temporal Prime — then what happens? That's where he needed to go anyway, to double his line, right? What's to stop him from doing so now?

These rules are incomplete, and even though a DM worth his merit will be able to adjust them to work and answer all the questions, doing so now makes the book not worth the money paid for it. I pay for a set of rules that I have to alter little, if any.

Jeff Crowell
Address Withheld

A source of great confusion and annoyance for me is the AD&D definitions and classification for the elven sub-races. More specifically, the problem is with the two main sub-races, grey elves and high elves.

The *Complete book of Elves* describes grey elves as "the most noble and most reclusive of the elves. . . withdrawn from the world... supercilious and condescending, full of their own importance. . . haughty, disdaining contact with others. . . least tolerant of other races" (pages 16-17).

High elves are described in these terms: "the most open and friendly. . . [they] have the most contact with the non-elven world. . . are very pale. . . their skin is less a corpse-like pallor than the color of new cream" (page 18).

It struck me as odd that the characteristics and attributes which describe the grey and high elves would be better suited if they described the other sub-race. I looked up the definition of "high" in three dictionaries, and this is some of what I found: "advanced, arrogant, elevated, exalted, haughty, lofty, noble, pompous" (*Webster's Dictionary*, 1986, page 190).

After comparing the definitions of the grey elf in the *Complete Book of Elves* and the definitions of the term "high," I'm sure that anyone would come to the same conclusion and ask the question, "Why is a grey elf not called a high elf and vice versa?"

The term "grey" means "ash colored, between light and dark, dull" (*Webster's*, 178). It seems the switch could be complete.

Ed Greenwood, the creator of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, discovered the same inconsistency. He switched the terms "high" and "grey" when describing the elven sub-races: "Gold elves are also called. . . high elves. [They] tend to be recognized as the most civilized of the elven subraces and the most aloof from humankind. . ."

"Moon elves are also called silver or grey elves, and are much paler than gold elves... they tend to tolerate humankind the most of the elven subraces. . . ." (*A Grand Tour of the Realms*, page 9, from the FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set).

The question I have for anyone reading this column is this: Should the main elven sub-races, the grey and high elves, have their labels switched, making grey elves high elves, and vice versa?

Peter Heyck
Ottawa, Ontario

I've been gaming a long time. Unlike most people who seem to think this is important, I can't really remember when I started, and I'm sorry that I can't quite peg it down to one memorable evening in the wilderness of Washington. But if there is one thing I've learned through all of it, it's that we all make mistakes in the game. DM and player alike, there's always rules discrepancies.

I have a problem with all the letters that keep appearing in Forum about the PLAYER'S OPTION™ rules. For those illithids among you who don't seem to get it: *It's optional!* If you don't like it, *don't use it!* Get it?

(Probably not.)

Anyway, the whole concept behind this, if any of you whiners read the foreword to each book, is that you are supposed to take the parts you like and keep them. You're supposed to toss the rules you don't like. That's the one power of the DM. It's his choice which rules are to be used.

Granted, it is always good to listen to the players and talk about the rules. Consider what the players want, what you want, evaluate what is left, and use

it. Yes, this does take time, and you probably will spend an entire game session, if not more, trying to nail this down.

In response to Rick Maffei's letter in issue #228, I agree about *Skills & Powers*, save for the argument about Muscle. Firstly, the book states that these are still stats and that no statistic may be raised above racial maximums. Therefore, the only way a warrior can have a Strength higher than 18/00 is if he is from the *DARK SUN*®, *DRAGONLANCE*®, or *BIRTHRIGHT*® settings.

As to the comment about the warrior with a Strength of 16, I ran into that little quirk, too. There's nothing in the rules about that problem, so I've instituted the following convention. Consult your *PHB* concerning the spell *strength*. Note that a warrior who has the spell cast on him and who winds up gaining percentile Strength may advance only one score bracket on the chart for each "point" the spell gives him. Take that convention and apply it to your dilemma.

If a warrior has a 16 Strength, he can advance only to 18 (no percentile). Now, say that warrior has a Strength of 17. His maximum Muscle score is 18/01. (Look at the chart: one step to 18, another to 18/01.) I suggest that for purposes of the actual score, DMs use the lowest allowable number in the bracket.

Example: a paladin I presently play wound up with a strength of 18/61. By our house rules, he could advance his muscle score only to 18/90 until I use a wish spell to raise his Strength.

Also, I suggest that when a player does this his Muscle or Stamina rise a bracket only if the Strength score itself rises. Remember, the subability can be no more than 2 points away from the "parent" score.

Tim Nutting
Address Withheld



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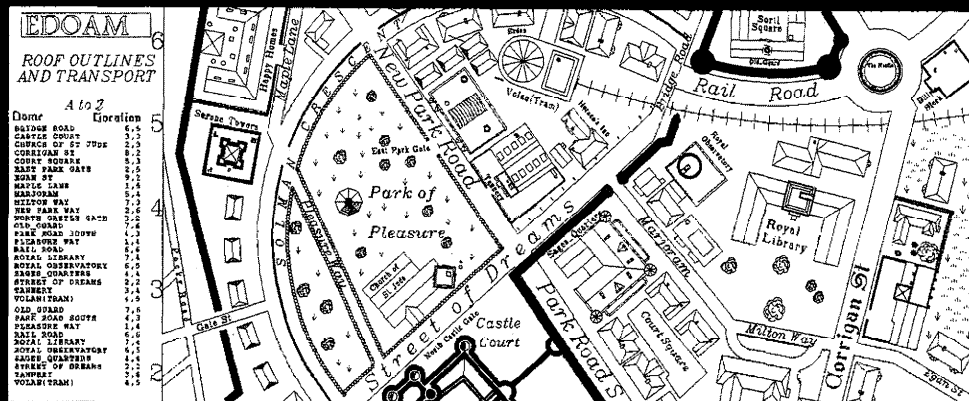
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Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

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This month, the Sage looks at spells, magical items, and optional rules for the AD&D® game. The sage also pauses to explain some of his own recent advice.

Please give me a clarification on the 5th-level wizard spell **contact other plane**. The optional rule box about aligned planes mentions a correlation between the caster's level and the maximum intelligence that he may contact, though the main spell description mentions nothing about caster level other than the number of questions that may be asked. Are there actually such limits on the contactable intelligence or may the wizard choose to contact whichever intelligence he wishes from the outset?

No matter which rule you use, the mind contacted is determined randomly, usually by rolling 1d10. If you use the optional rule, the spell caster picks the plane he contacts. If the caster chooses an outer plane, roll 1d8 instead of 1d10. A roll of 1 indicates that caster has contacted the equivalent of an Astral intelligence. A roll of 8 indicates the caster has contacted a being with an Intelligence score of 25. However, any difference in alignment between the caster and the prevailing alignment on the plane contacted (see the PLANESCAPE™ boxed set) reduces the intelligence the caster actually contacts by reducing the die roll (which is always at least "1"). The reduc-

tion works as explained in the optional rule box. The reference to the caster's level in the optional rule box is superfluous because caster level has no bearing on the intelligence contacted.

When developing new characters for the AD&D game, do the initial scores rolled for Ability Scores include the racial bonuses? Or is the bonus given after a roll meets the minimum? For example, a minotaur needs a Constitution of 12 as a minimum requirement. Minotaurs also receive a +2 bonus to their Constitution. If the player rolls a 10, can he add the bonus to meet the minimum require-

ment? Or must the player roll a score of 12 on the dice first, then apply the bonus?

In most cases, a new character has to meet the ability score requirements for his race before making any racial adjustments to Ability Scores. For example, if a player rolls a 10 for a character's Constitution score and an 18 for the same character's Charisma score, that character cannot be a dwarf because Table 7 in the PHB lists a minimum Constitution of 11 for dwarves and limits dwarves to 17 in Charisma. The character can't be a dwarf even though dwarves get a +1 Constitution bonus and a -1 Charisma penalty because the player must consult the table *before* making any adjustments. The same character could become a gnome, however, and would apply the ability adjustments for gnomes from Table 8. Note that at the beginning of play, a dwarf's maximum Constitution score is 19 (18+1) and a dwarf's maximum Charisma score is 16 (17-1).

Unfortunately, not all the expansions to the AD&D game follow the PHB's example. For instance, the *Complete*

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Book of Humanoids lists adjusted scores in its racial ability score tables. (This explains why Table 12 includes so many numbers lower than three and higher than 18.) In this case, the player must make the racial adjustments to the character's ability scores and consult the table. If the character doesn't meet the requirements after the adjustments, the character's Ability Scores revert to their unadjusted values and the player has to choose a different race for the character.

My question pertains to the psionist power ectoplasmic form. One of the players in our group is rather fond of turning into ectoplasmic form, picking up objects, sticking them into people, and letting go. He claims this is an instant kill. Is this valid? Is it an evil act? Are there any special saving throws applicable? Also, what are the effects of sticking objects into objects?

No, what you describe isn't a valid use of the ectoplasmic form power. No, it's not necessarily evil. No, there are no special saves.

A character assuming ectoplasmic form can take along clothing, armor, and up to 15 lbs. of equipment he's carrying. Weapons, backpacks, magical items, and the like don't automatically come along; they count toward the 15-lb. limit. The character has to leave any excess equipment behind. Anything the character isn't holding or carrying when he assumes ectoplasmic form doesn't go along. So the character cannot assume ectoplasmic form, walk across a room, pick up a rock, and make that ectoplasmic too.

Anything the character converts into ectoplasmic form stays in that form until the character resumes his own normal form, even if the character drops the object. Resuming normal form inside a solid object or inside another creature can be harmful, but only to the ectoplasmic creature. The solid object or creature has dibs on the space it occupies. At best, the ectoplasmic creature or object is displaced a sufficient distance so it can materialize without harm. I suggest, however, that the ectoplasmic character is violently forced through a dimensional rift to the Ethereal plane, suffering 3d10 hp damage — with no chance for a saving throw. Sticking an ectoplasmic object into something else and materializing is just as nasty as sticking part of the character's body into something; the person responsible for making the rift is drawn inside of it and suffers damage.

Would you please clarify the use of the *feign death* spell, particularly with regard to its casting time of ½? Does this mean that the caster uses it just prior to an opponents' attack? Is it so quick that the attacker does not realize that the spell was cast? If the spell is cast prior to an attack does the attack now hit automatically? Won't the attacker become suspicious if the caster "drops dead" after a missed attack?

Technically, a spell's casting time is added to the caster's initiative roll to determine exactly when the spell takes effect. Since the initiative system uses only whole numbers, the casting time of ½ is problematical. In this case, I think the intent is to allow the caster to cast the spell pretty much instantaneously. I recommend treating *feign death* like an innate ability, but with no initiative modifier. An opponent can beat the caster to the punch, but he can't disrupt the spell. The caster can time the spell so that it takes effect right after an opponents attack if he wishes.

The spell has a verbal component, so an alert opponent might notice the casting. An opponent successfully using the spellcraft proficiency while watching the spellcaster would know the caster used a necromantic spell. Other witnesses might be allowed a slim chance — no better than a check vs. one half Intelligence — and then only if they had some reason to suspect a spell. (*Feign death* has no somatic or material component, so its not easy to catch.) In any case, combat in the AD&D game always works in the abstract; "misses" might very well actually strike the target (albeit ineffectually), and some "hits" might not make contact at all. (Maybe the target pulled a hamstring while avoiding the blow.) Any attack that causes the target to drop dead is likely to be interpreted as a hit. If a PC made the attack, simply note the attack roll's result and announce that the blow connected and slew the target. Let the player puzzle out what happened. If an NPC made the attack, consider how alert the character might be to tricks. Someone very sure of himself might very well believe he made a killing blow, while someone familiar with the caster's reputation might become suspicious if a famous character goes down too easily. Some monstrous foes might try to drag the "slain" character back to their lairs for snacks.

According to the PLANESCAPE rules, the farther a priest is from her power,

the lower level she effectively becomes. If a priest casts a defensive spell on a plane near to her power, then goes to another plane farther from her power, would the spell still be active even though she effectively dropped several levels in ability? For instance, a 7th-level priest in my party cast *magical vestment* on herself in the Beastlands just prior to entering a portal to the Grey Waste, where she "lost" six levels of ability. Would the spell still be active for its duration even though the caster could no longer cast it?

When plane hopping, a spell functions according to the conditions that prevailed when the spell was cast, unless the local condition is an absolute. A *flame blade*, for example, goes out if carried onto the elemental plane of water, where no fire spell works. In your example, *magical vestment* keeps working at full power, because the character was functioning at full power when she cast the spell. See the upcoming *Planewalker's Handbook* for more information.

How many volumes will the upcoming *Wizard's Spell Compendium* have? Will there be similar volumes for priest spells?

The current plan is for three volumes of the *Wizard's Spell Compendium*, followed by one or two volumes of priest spells. I'm sorry I can't be more exact, but there's just no way to tell exactly how many spells there really are until somebody actually finishes compiling them all.

Page 123 of the *Complete Druid's Handbook* lists several spells I have never heard of and that aren't listed in the book. Where can I get information on spells such as *ceremony* and *precipitation*? Also, why are some of the spells' levels changed, like *cure light wounds* as 2nd-level spell and *finger of death* as a 7th-level spell?

Pages 122 and 123 of the *Complete Druid's Handbook* describe druids as they appeared in the original AD&D game. That's why some of the spell levels are different. The spells you're asking about came from the *Unearthed Arcana* tome, now long out of print. Current plans call for both spells to be included in the upcoming *Priest's Spell Compendium*, but that's subject to change.

A *sword of sharpness* has a +1 bonus for attack rolls and damage and it severs a limb on a modified roll of 19-21. If a *sword of sharpness* had a +3 magical

bonus (such as the one carried by Prince Melf Brightflame in the *From the Ashes* boxed set), how likely is it to sever a limb? What about a vorpal weapon? Would a *vorpal sword +5* sever necks on rolls of 20-25?

The DM has two options. First, he can assume that the sword severs a limb on any attack roll that totals 19 or more, considering only the sword's +3 bonus; that is, on an attack roll of 16 or more. (Bonuses from Strength specialization, race, combat conditions, and so on never apply to the score to sever.) Alternatively, he can assume the sword severs a limb on an attack roll of 18 or higher, just as a normal *sword of sharpness* does. I prefer this option.

It doesn't matter which option you choose, so long as you apply it consistently. In either case, the attack must succeed to sever a limb. If the sword wielder rolls a 19 and still manages to miss, the sword severs nothing. Note that the actual number required to sever varies with the type of opponent. The base number to sever for a regular *sword of sharpness* is 18 for a normal opponent, 19 for an opponent larger than man size, and 20 for solid metal or stone opponents. If you choose the first option, the numbers would fall to 16, 17, and 18.

Non-standard *vorpal swords* can work the same way. The normal *vorpal swords* severs the neck on a roll of 17 for a normal opponent, 18 for an opponent larger than man size, and 22 for solid metal or stone opponents. If you choose the first option, the numbers for a *vorpal sword +5* would fall to 15, 16, and 17.

How do you handle initiative for a priests attempt to turn undead? The rules say a turning attempt counts as an action for the character and takes one round. It also says that the turning effect occurs during the priests turn in the initiative order and that any opposing undead might get to attack the priest before he can make the attempt. I notice that Table 56: Optional Modifiers to Initiative does not include an entry for undead turning. Does this mean the priest always goes last if he attempts undead turning? That could be pretty rough on a lone priest facing a group of undead.

A turning attempt counts as the priest's sole action for the round; the priest cannot move, attack, cast a spell, use a magical item, or take any other significant actions during the same

round as a turning attempt. (In the PLAYER'S OPTION™ combat system, a turning attempt is a no-move action.) The priest rolls for initiative normally, and the attempt is resolved during the priest's normal place in the initiative order. There is no entry for turning attempts on Table 56 because undead turning is neither particularly slow nor particularly fast — the priest makes an unmodified initiative roll unless some other factor also applies (see Table 55: Standard Modifiers to Initiative).

Do gauntlets of ogre power affect the wearers maximum encumbrance or ability to open doors?

Gauntlets of ogre power grant the wearer 18/00 Strength in the hands, arms, and shoulders. The wearer enjoys the benefits of the increased Strength in combat and most "bend/bars" lift gates rolls. The bonus doesn't apply to feats of strength that involve the whole body, which generally includes carrying loads and opening doors. If you're using the subabilities from the *Skills & Powers* book, the *gauntlets* increase the wearer's muscle score only, and then only for actions the character performs with his

hands, arms, and shoulders.

The *Skills & Powers* book allows priests to spend character points to purchase a school of wizard spells and use them as priest spells. Does this mean the priest can cast these spells while wearing armor? Can the priest fill his bonus spell slots from high Wisdom with these spells? Can the priest spend extra character points and gain more than one school of wizard spells?

The selected school of wizard spells works just like a sphere of priest spells in all respects. The character can memorize and cast them freely without sacrificing any priest abilities (and the spells can fill bonus spell slots from high Wisdom). The DM should feel free to limit which schools might be available. (A deity of truth might balk at granting a cleric or priest illusion spells.) I strongly recommend that you do not allow anyone to purchase more than one school of wizard spells for a priest character.

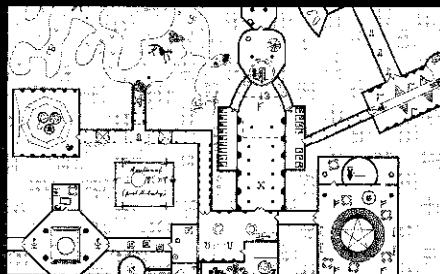
In issue #228, you mentioned the spells that could remove an *antimagic shell*. What about the spell *spellstrike* from the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting? As

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it is, in a sense, a “retroactive” *dispel magic* could it remove an *antimagick shell*?

Yes, but remember that *spellstrike* negates only spells and effects created (cast) during the round in which the *spellstrike* is cast or during the previous round.

I enjoyed your response in issue #228 to the reader who objected to your answer about the *frisky chest* spell back in issue #225. But you didn't quite handle all his objections. Do you really advocate changing the rules in the middle of the game to restrict player innovation? If not, when should a DM introduce a weight limit for *frisky chest* as you suggested? By the way, is it really impossible to stack one's slain or paralyzed comrades on a *Tenser's floating disk*?

Of course you shouldn't change the rules during the game; that's just common courtesy. The proper time to introduce rules changes is sometime after the game ends and before the next game begins. It's often helpful to write your rules changes down and keep them handy for future reference. By the way, the *frisky chest* spell is due for a major overhaul. In addition to a weight limit (100 lbs. per caster level), an area of effect reduction also is officially in the works, most likely 10 cubic feet (about 2' x 2' x 2½') instead of a 10' cube. The upcoming *Priest's Spell Compendium* will contain the revised spell.

Yeah, you can carry bodies on a *Tenser's floating disk*, or just about any other objects or creatures you can heap onto the disk (keeping them there might be a separate problem). On the other hand, you can't use the *disk* as a weapon or a battering ram. It's a load carrier, period. You can't use a disk to bowl over opponents or smash things. A disk just floats around like a blimp, giving no more than a gentle bump when it strikes a creature or object.

In any case, I certainly hope everyone who reads this column realizes that the DM's task is keeping the game under control without being a spoilsport.

The reason you ought not to let PCs use *frisky chest* spells to make their treasure walk out of the dungeon is because that kind of thinking eventually leads to all kinds of other “innovations” that could make the DM consider more rewarding games — like solitaire. For instance, let's say the party discussed in issue #225 took some of the proceeds from their 10' golden statue and

invested in two or three 10' granite statues. Then, they cast *frisky chest* on a statue (which weighs in the neighborhood of 3,000 lbs.), and the party's lead fighter herds it along. Now the party has a statue leading the way wherever it goes. (They also cast a *continual light* spell on the statue's upraised hand so that it doubles as a torch bearer.) With the statue in the lead, the party no longer has to fear traps, because the statue will trip them as it walks 3-10' ahead of the group. If the statue falls into a pit, no matter. Someone just hops in after it and the statue flies right out again (assuming the DM isn't going to do anything to stifle player innovation, like require an item save when the statue falls into the pit or put something in the pit that the PCs don't want to jump into).

While the party chases its *frisky* statue through the dungeon, anything foolish enough to stand in the party's way finds a ton and half of crushing stone plowing through as the party charges right in. The party might run their ton-and-a-half juggernaut into any door they find, smashing it to flinders. Of course, the spell description says the statue avoids getting with 10' of anyone but

the caster, so it couldn't be used to crush opponents, and the *frisky* item moves only through open space, so it won't smash through barriers. On the other hand, a group that can talk the DM into letting them get away with using *frisky chest* as a permanent *animate object* probably needn't worry about little things like what the rules say.

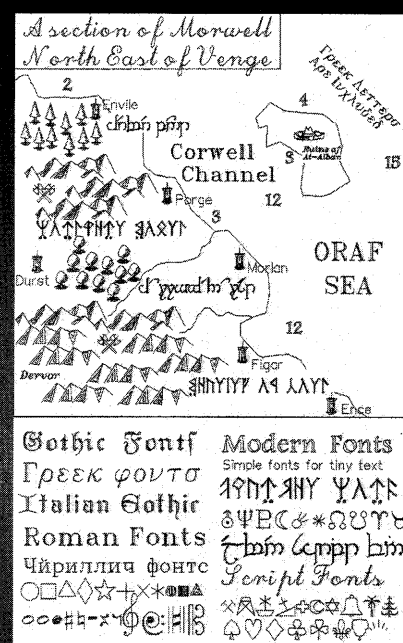
If the party took along an extra *frisky chest* spell, they'd have no need for spells like *Tenser's floating disk*; they need only take any old dungeon door off its hinges and apply *frisky chest*. The door will galumph along carrying anything the PCs strap or nail onto it.

Even if the party only used *frisky chest* to turn a statue into a trap springer, they still would be getting more mileage out of this 2nd-level spell that they could get out of the 6th-level priest spell *animate object* (which has a shorter duration and produces considerable slower movement rates for large objects) or the 5th-level wizard spell *avoidance* (which affects only objects with volumes of 27 cubic feet or less). That alone should set alarm bells ringing in any sensible DM's head.

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Magic and technology are different, you said in issue #228. However, any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. What do you say to that?

I'd say you've stumbled across an excellent illustration of my point. "Sufficiently advanced" technology becomes indistinguishable from magic because its effects appear so miraculous that an observer can find no rational explanation for them.

Any 20th-century person with a grade-school education knows something about how a laser works, but if a person from a medieval culture finds a laser and discovers that he can toast bread with it, he's apt to think of it as a magical bread toaster. He has no idea the laser emits a coherent beam of light through the stimulated emission of radiation, and, lacking that knowledge, he's not going to discover laser surgery. If someone else comes along and demonstrates other uses for the laser, the medieval fellow is going to think of the technician as some sort of wizard.

The difference between technology and magic is this: technology depends on an understanding of reality. Technology works the way it does because someone has thought through a chain of cause and effect that gives a predictable result. For example, a light bulb lights a room because somebody with an understanding of electricity and metallurgy created a situation in which the light bulb must glow brightly when somebody throws the switch.

Magic, by contrast, does not take advantage of some clever person's knowledge of reality, it literally changes reality to suit the user's taste. In the AD&D game, each spell's ability to change reality is narrowly defined in the spell description. It's helpful to think of any magical spell as a minor *wish* with a predetermined effect. If your character wants light, he casts a *light* spell, and he gets light — but that's all he gets. Of course, the character can do some clever things with that light, such as blind somebody by making the light appear on the end of his nose, but no character will ever bake a cake or incubate an egg with the waste heat from the *light* spell as one can with an incandescent light bulb, because there isn't any waste heat.

Spells often prove to have some curious limitations (at least to 20th-century minds). A *magic missile* won't affect objects, only creatures. A *magic missile*

doesn't "know" a creature from an object, but the terms of the spell, just like the terms of a *wish*, allow it to affect only creatures.

It's important to keep the foregoing in mind when deciding how a spell functions in an unusual situation. Unlike technology, a spell acts in a manner suited to its purpose or it does nothing at all. Consider the *frisky chest* spell that started this discussion. The spell is supposed to keep

intruders' hands off the caster's stuff. Knowing that, it's no great leap of logic to realize that frisky object is going to move in a contrary fashion when somebody starts chasing it around a dungeon.

In any case, it's incumbent on players to put themselves in a frame of mind suited to the fantasy worlds where their characters live. When playing the AD&D game, you need to think like a person living in a magical world would think,



You sure have got an eye for detail!

by Jerry Cogan

not like a person living in the technological world of the late 20th century would think.



Skip Williams is a game designer and editor at TSR, Inc. He also grows fiery Thai peppers at home. Questions can be addressed to him at tsrsage@aol.com.

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DragonMirth

"When I first arrived in this country, son, I had nothing except my two bare hands and a band of bloodthirsty mercenaries."



By Rex May



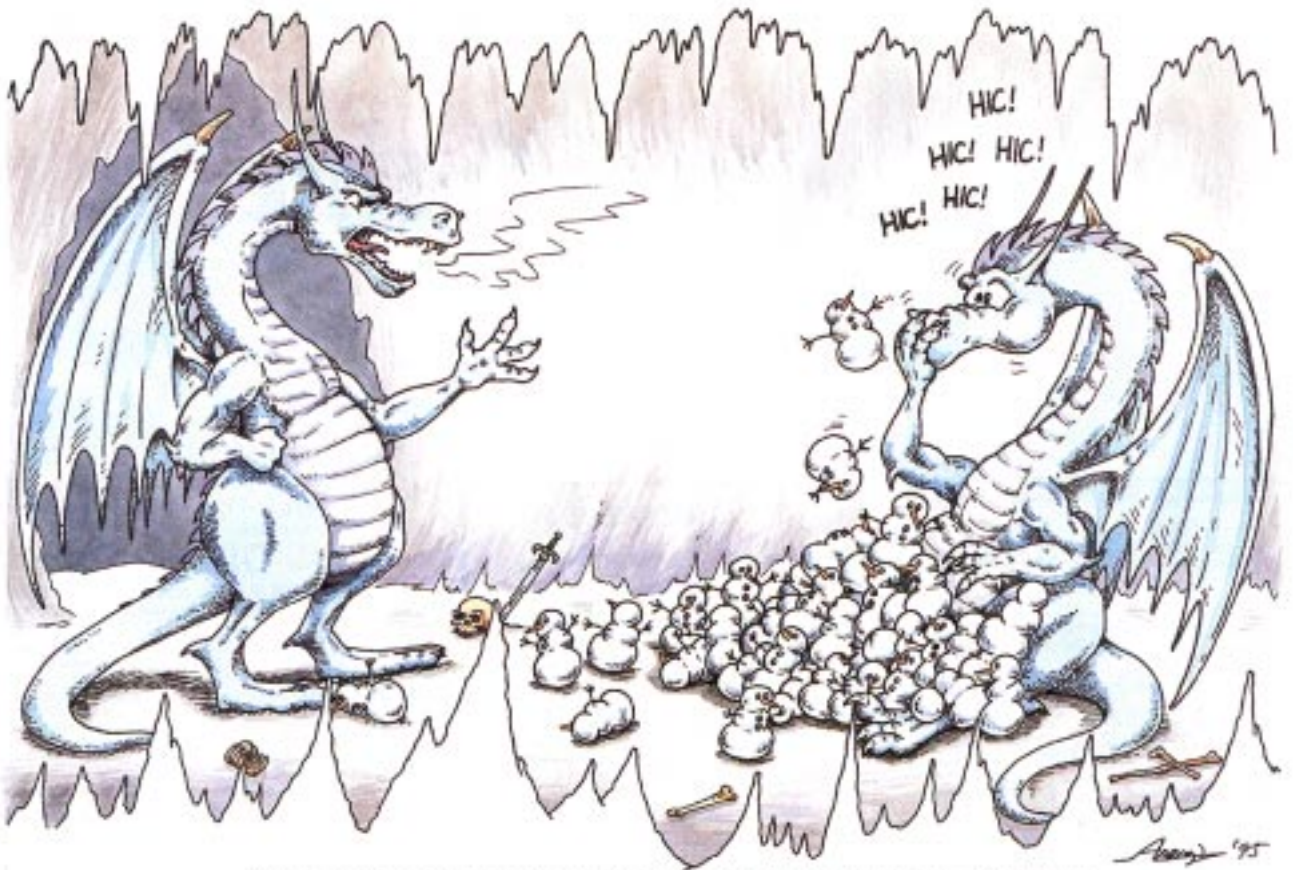
By Mathew Guss

FLINT AND STEEL By Bill Hrenchuk



"You think you have problems, I go through forty winks like a hot scimitar through butter."





"Aw, for crying out loud, Howard! Try holding your breath or something!"

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Knights of the Dinner Table™

By Jolly R. Blackburn

OKAY, BOB, AS YOU EMERGE FROM THE BANK, YOUR CHEAP REVOLVER JAMS.... NO, SORRY. THAT WAS A "2" I ROLLED, THE REVOLVER EXPLODES IN YOUR FACE. SADLY IT'S A MORTAL WOUND — YOU'RE DEAD. THE STOLEN LOOT FALLS TO THE GROUND AS A POOL OF YOUR BLOOD....

DEAD? AGAIN!? I THINK THE RULES TO **HACKMASTER: CATTLEPUNK** ARE WHACKED! EVERY TIME MY CHARACTER GETS SHOT HE DIES!!

YEAH! WE'RE WEARING OUT OUR SIX-SIDERS ROLLIN' UP NEW CHARACTERS. WE'VE TRIED ROBBING THIS STINKING BANK FIVE TIMES AND END UP DEAD EVERY TIME!

KEEP GOING WITH THAT THOUGHT **DAVE!** YOU'RE SO CLOSE TO LEARNING SOMETHING HERE. LIKE MAYBE, **CRIME DOESN'T PAY?**

DAMN! I THOUGHT THE GATTLING GUN ON THE ROOF OF THE CHURCH WOULD HELP US ESCAPE.

BLAST MY AIM! IF THE PREACHER HADN'T RUN SO FAST I COULD'VE SILENCED HIM. SORRY GUYS.

I'M LOOKING AT A BUNCH OF IDIOTS! LOOK GUYS, I EXPLAINED THIS A THOUSAND TIMES. YOU'RE NOT DUNGEON CRAWLING ANYMORE. THERE'S NO MAGIC HERE, NO +12 **HACKMASTERS**, NO MAGIC DUST THAT WILL CURE YOUR WOUNDS. IT'S THE ROUGH AND TUMBLE WEST. BULLETS ARE LETHAL! AND IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THAT BULLET COMES FROM THE GUN OF THE TOWN DRUNK OR FROM A LEGENDARY GUNFIGHTER. THE RESULT IS THE SAME — **DEATH!**

I THOUGHT THIS GAME WAS SUPPOSED TO BE **HISTORICAL!** HUH! HOW IN THE HELL DID ANYBODY GET ANYTHING DONE IN THE WILD WEST IF THEY WERE **DYING** ALL THE TIME? **ANSWER ME THAT!**

YEAH, **JOHNNY SADDLESORE** DIDN'T GO AROUND DYING ALL THE TIME! I SAW HIM TAKE A BULLET IN THE KIDNEY ONCE. HE PLUGGED THE HOLE WITH SOME CHEWING TOBACCO AND KEPT RIDING.

HEY, I SAW THAT ONE. LATER, A BLIND BANDITO SEWED HIS WOUNDS WITH A GUITAR STRING. AFTER THAT, WHENEVER HE HAD TO GO TO THE BATHROOM, HE WOULD HE WOULD SAY HE HAD TO GO **TUNE HIS GUITAR**. HAR HAR.

GUYS YOU JUST HAVE TO LEARN TO CHANGE YOUR TACTICS. KICKING IN DOORS AND LOBBING FIREBALLS AND SWINGING SWORDS WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE HERE. YOU HAVE TO USE YOUR HEAD AND **THINK** BEFORE YOU ACT.

OKAY, I **THINK** I'LL ROLL UP A NEW CHARACTER AND ROB THAT BANK.

AND I **THINK** I'M GONNA BUY A SAWED-OFF SHOTGUN. LET'S SEE THAT BANK TELLER TRY AND PISTOL WHIP ME

BRIAN, **PLEASE!** LET'S ME AND YOU BECOME BOUNTY HUNTERS — LET'S GO **LEGIT!**

IT A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE SARA — WE WANT TO ROB THAT BANK AND **BA** WON'T LET US. THERE'S ONLY 350 CITIZENS IN THIS TOWN. EVENTUALLY WE'LL WEAR THEM DOWN.

HOURS PASS...

AND AS **BOSS GENTRY** CLUTCHES HIS CHEST IN PAIN AND DROPS TO THE FLOOR, THE LAST DEFENDER OF THE **LUCKY STRIKE BANK** DIES. **CONGRATULATIONS!** YOU'VE MADE **DESERT GORGE** A GHOST TOWN, SLAUGHTERED INNOCENT CITIZENS AND MOST LIKELY HAVE KEPT THE TERRITORY FROM OBTAINING STATEHOOD. I WON'T EVEN MENTION HOW YOU WASTED THE 12 HOURS OF **MY** TIME I SPENT PREPARING AN AWESOME ADVENTURE THAT **YOU** CHOSE TO IGNORE. I HOPE IT WAS WORTH THE \$5,000 YOU MANAGE TO ROUND UP IN THE BANK VAULT.

HA HA! I'M GETTIN' TO BE A PRETTY **DEAD AIM!** ONLY FOUR SHOTS TO BRING DOWN THAT OLD GEEZER! THAT PUTS ME THREE UP ON YOUR BODY COUNT BRIAN. YOU OWE ME A COLD SODA.

HEY I HAVE AN IDEA. SINCE THE TOWN IS ABANDONED — WE COULD RUN THE BANK AND LURE NEW SETTLERS TO THE AREA. WHEN THEY COME IN AND DEPOSIT THEIR MONEY, **WE KEEP IT!** **HA HA!!**

I SEE YOUR FUTURE, DAVE, AND IT INCLUDES A PAROLE OFFICER NAMED **SLAPPY!**

OK GUYS, I SAY WE HIT THE **GOLD DEPOSITORY** IN **OX HEAD!!**

SIDE BETS? YOU MADE SIDE BETS ON THE BODY COUNT?

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"ANY WISH?"

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JEFF GRUBB

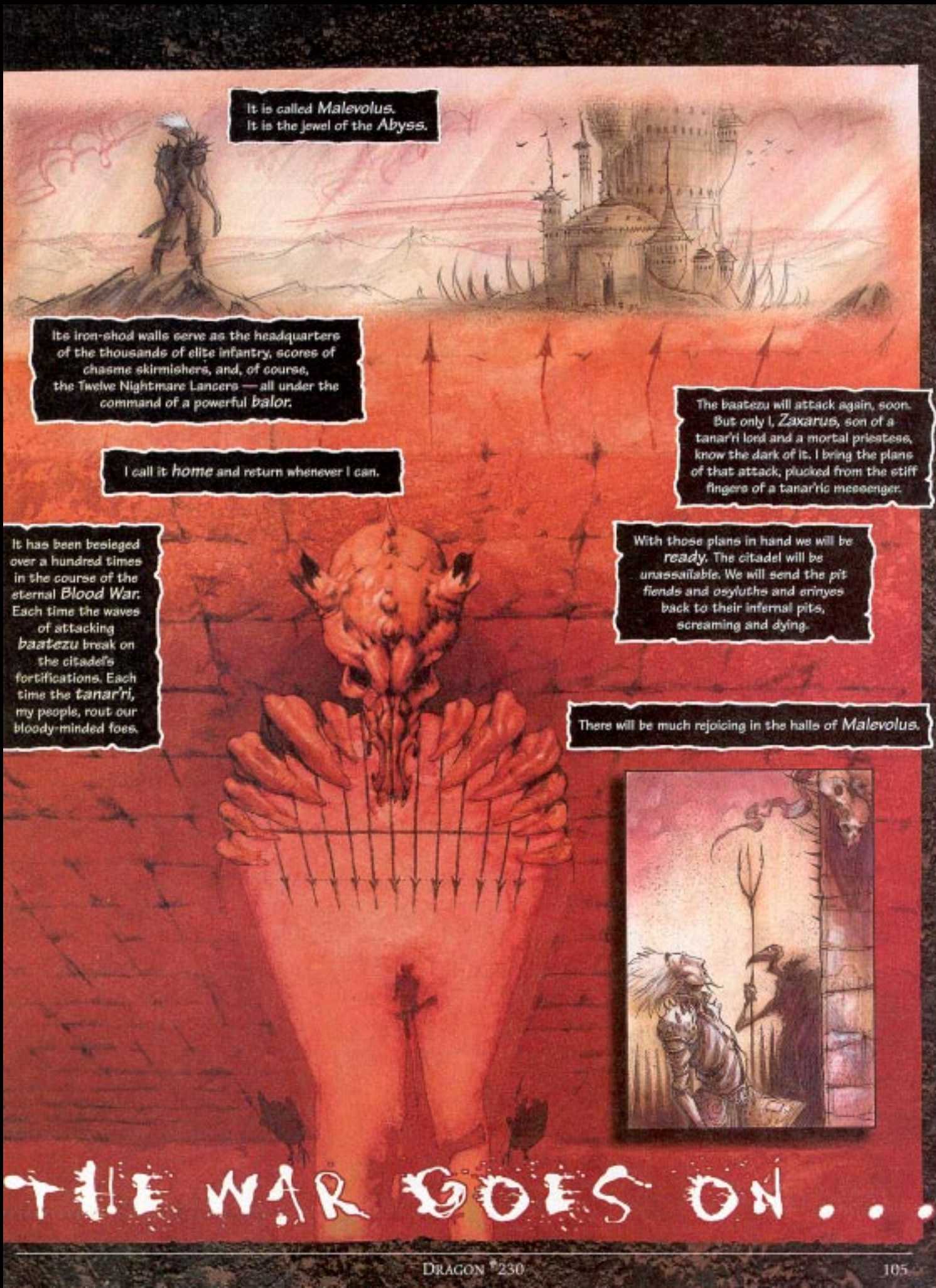
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C+O+M+P+U+T+E+R GRAPHICS
& DESIGN

DAWN MURIN



It is called *Malevolus*.
It is the jewel of the Abyss.

Its iron-shod walls serve as the headquarters of the thousands of elite infantry, scores of chasme skirmishers, and, of course, the Twelve Nightmare Lancers — all under the command of a powerful *balor*.

I call it *home* and return whenever I can.


The baatezu will attack again, soon. But only I, *Zaxarus*, son of a tanar'ri lord and a mortal priestess, know the dark of it. I bring the plans of that attack, plucked from the stiff fingers of a tanar'ric messenger.

With those plans in hand we will be *ready*. The citadel will be *unavailable*. We will send the pit fiends and *osyluths* and *erinyes* back to their infernal pits, screaming and dying.

There will be much rejoicing in the halls of *Malevolus*.



THE WAR GOES ON...



I feel *comfortable* within the iron walls, despite the angry stares that follow me. I cannot *blame* the other tanar'ri for being peery. I am a *cambion*, a half-breed — part fiend, part human. That makes me invaluable as an *agent*. Not all *recognize* my value, but they will, and very *soon*.

I could send the battle plans *ahead* with a dretch servant, but I have a reason to deliver them *myself*.

Her name is *Alamanda*. Fetching, sinuous, beautiful, serpentine *Alamanda*, officially the balor's chief lieutenant.

She is *never* far from my mind.

Alamanda is a *marilith*, her lower body a slithering snake's tail, from her slim waist up lovely, radiant, and *human*. She has six human arms to hold me and soft human lips to *kiss*...

We've known each other for aeons — fought together, feasted together, and shared foul secrets together. She won't believe me when I tell her I *missed* her.

She *never* does.

I think that delivering the plans to her merits *special* attention. I think it is an excuse to pull her away from her work. I think it is a chance to walk along the battlements, and then back to my quarters. I think...

IT ALL GOES TO HELL...

I think...

I think...

I think...



Alamanda,

Lovely Alamanda

Alamanda



Alamanda



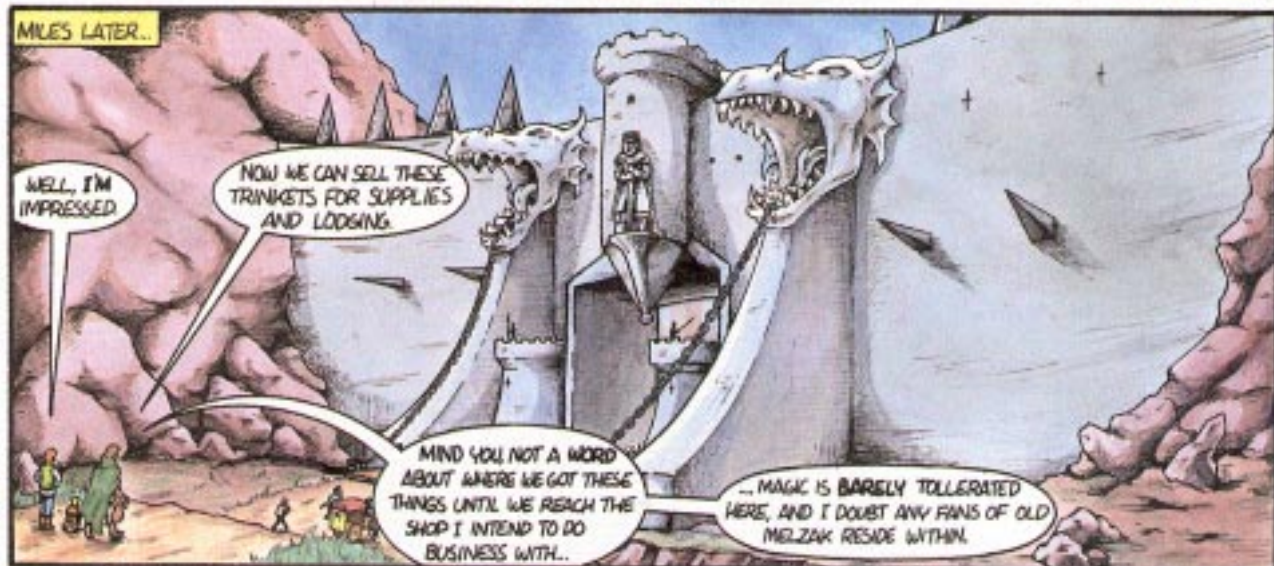
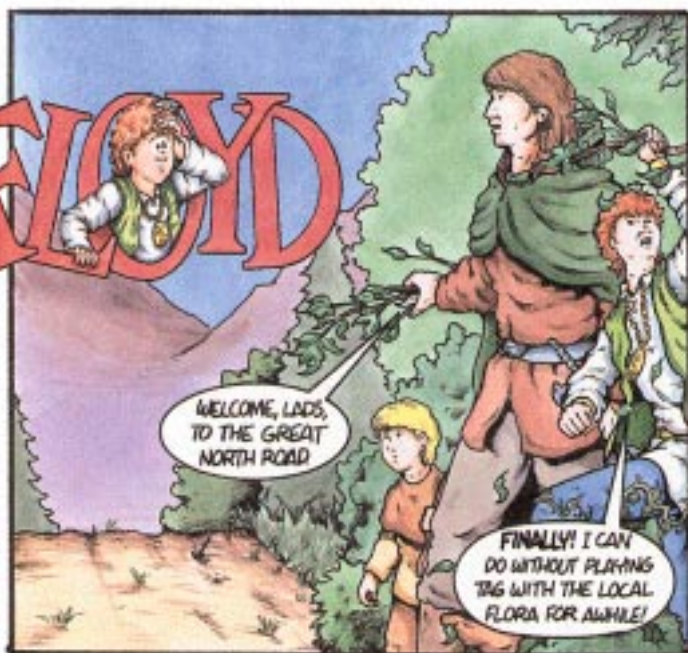
Alamanda



Alamanda

FLOYD

By Aaron Williams







Role-Playing

Reviews

Science-fiction gaming:
still alive and well

© 1996 Rick Swan

Would you hand me another tissue? Sometimes I get on these crying jags, and I just can't stop. You gotta understand, the Traveller* game was more than just another science-fiction RPG to me. And it was more than just the *best* science-fiction RPG. It was my *first* RPG. It's true. I was playing Traveller before the AD&D® game even, and now that's gone well, I guess you never get over the first one.

What's that? Traveller's coming back? Don't toy with me! When? What do you mean, you don't know! You can't

just lay something like that on me and, hey... I'm trying to stay calm, all right?

Okay, okay, I'm fine. Really. I can wait. I got some other games to keep me busy.

Uh, sorry about the tear stains on your dice bag.

The DarkStryder Campaign

Star Wars* game supplement

Two 96-page softcover books, 52 character and ship cards, one 22' x 34' double-sided poster map, boxed

West End Games \$30




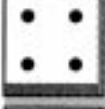


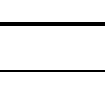
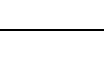
Design: Peter Schweighofer, Doug Shuler, Bill Smith, Eric Trautmann, and Timothy Zahn with Daniel Scott Palter, Richard Hawran, Stephen Crane, Paul Sudlow, Pablo Hidalgo, and Miranda Horner

Editing: Bill Smith and Paul Sudlow with Miranda Horner, Peter Schweighofer, and Eric Trautmann

Illustrations: Tim Bobko, David Day, Terry Pavlet, Brian Schomburg, Philip Tan, David Deltrick, Christopher Moeller, Doug Shuler, and Mike Vilardi

Cover: Christopher Moeller

Role-playing games' rating

	Not recommended	
	May be useful	
	Fair	
	Good	
	Excellent	
	The BEST!	



In 1983 — the year of *Return of the Jedi* — Ronald Reagan was in the third year of his presidency, Michael Jackson was on his second nose, and George Lucas had just begun to fiddle with future installments of the *Star Wars* series. In 1996, Bill Clinton is wrapping up his first term, Michael Jackson is on nose number nine, and George Lucas is *still* fiddling with future installments of the *Star Wars* series. Lucas may be a genius but when it comes to cranking out product — well, the Force ain't exactly been with him.

Meanwhile, over at West End Games, the design team of the *Star Wars* RPG has been understandably anxious. During the game's impressive 10-year run, they'd produced dozens of quality supplements. But how long could they keep it up? How many times could they go to the well — in this case, about six and a half hours of film — before they started coming up with sand? They couldn't just sit on their hands, waiting for Lucas to deliver another movie. Nor could they expand the mythos in any significant way, because, according to Lucasfilm, that's a no-no.

So they opted for a new approach. The result, *Darkstryder Campaign*, marks one of the most dramatic turning points in the game's history. For starters, this is the game's first boxed set (excluding the recent *Miniatures Battles* box), making it a big deal by definition. Rather than invent their own alter egos, players are encouraged to assume the roles of pregenerated characters. Further, each player is encouraged to play *several* characters, all at the same time.

But the real departure for **DarkStryder** is in its tone. Forget your cuddly Ewoks, your bumbling droids, your kiddie show aliens. **DarkStryder** conjures a harsher, drearier universe, a Star Wars for grown-ups. The premise: despicable bad guy Moff Sarne, an Imperial warlord with unlimited power, has fled the Kahol sector capital Kal-Shebbol to wreak havoc on a sizable chunk of the galaxy. With few resources and virtually no information about Sarne's whereabouts or plans, the PCs board a second-rate starship and attempt to track him down. The campaign features villains who murder, allies who backstab, and heroes who die. A haze of despair hangs over **DarkStryder**, which is both intriguing and disturbing. It's like visiting Oz and finding alcoholic Munchkins.

The *Campaign Book* covers the background material, opening with a terrific Timothy Zahn short story that sets up the situation and establishes a gloomy mood. Much of the book is devoted to the *FarStar*, the converted Corellian military ship that serves as the PCs' transportation. It is, to put it succinctly, a piece of junk. Lights flicker on and off for no apparent reason. The sensors suck up too much power. The ceilings leak. A sabotaged computer system ensures a steady stream of misfiring weapons, navigational glitches, and malfunctioning droids. *FarStar* is a high-tech obstacle course; a party could engage in a memorable campaign just wandering the corridors. The Locations section, describing the *FarStar's* every nook and cranny, manages to be comprehensive without overdosing on statistics; conceivably, the ship could be used in other RPGs with only a few modifications.

The crew, a source of endless torment for the PCs (and endless possibility for the gamemaster), is as undependable as the ship. The cramped conditions and lousy accommodations make them surly, obnoxious, and inclined to beat the crap out of each other at the slightest provocation. Memorable crewfolk include Security Officer Gorak Khzam, a former slave trader; Lieutenant Jessa Davjus, an Imperial turncoat plagued by dreams of black spiders; and Lieutenant "Wing-Ripper" (love that name!) Gorjaye, a red-haired beauty with the charm of a rabid dog. All key personnel have their own character cards, featuring evocative color portraits and handy statistical summaries. The cards are a nice touch, useful to players and gamemasters alike. In the good old days, TSR routinely included cards

like these in their supplements. I'd like to see them do it again. As a matter of fact, I'd like to see *all* publishers include them, as they're great time-savers for lazy guys like yours truly.

The background material spills over into the *Adventure Book*, which begins with an informative overview of the Kathol Sector, complete with star maps, planet profiles, and a gallery of villains. The heart of the book, however, is the set of six adventures, linked to form one long campaign. "Omens," the opener, sends the party to the devastated Kolatil system where they're confronted with evidence of Sarne's ruthlessness. "Artifact of Aaris" involves a dangerous archeological expedition, which triggers more than the usual amount of chaos aboard the *FarStar*. Overall, they're well-staged and easy-to-run adventures, offering a satisfying blend of action, problem-solving, and role-playing. There's not much in the way of logical technology, however; of all the science-fiction RPGs, Star Wars remains the most science-less. And don't expect Sarne to show up; he may be a major player in some future supplement, but not here. Most troubling, the campaign doesn't really go anywhere; it's all set-up and no climax; think how you felt at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Evaluation: This set looks to be the first in a long line of **DarkStryder** products. As such, with its unresolved plot lines and unanswered questions, it feels incomplete. The designers still seem to be groping for a style, as if they're not quite sure how far they can go. Consequently, **DarkStryder** doesn't plunge Star Wars into darkness; it merely draws the shades a bit. Next time, I hope they throw caution to the wind and *really* go for the grit. For now, **DarkStryder** stands as a promising beginning, a rich, involving expansion that opens up an RPG on the verge of rusting shut. Let Lucas dawdle. West End is delivering the goods.

Don't Look Back* game (Second Edition)

208-page softcover book
Mind Ventures Games

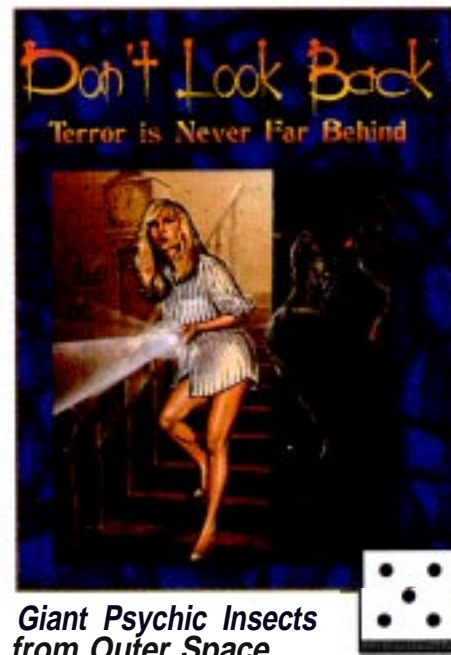
\$22

Design: Chuck McGrew with Richard Van Ingram and Jay Coleman

Editing: Jay Coleman, Richard Van Ingram, and Scott Dillin

Illustrations: Paul Carrick, Tim Gerstmar, and Richard Van Ingram

Cover: Doug Shuler and Paul Carrick



Giant Psychic Insects from Outer Space

Don't Look Back game supplement

96-page softcover book

Mind Ventures Games \$15

Design: Jay Coleman and David Kosak

Editing: Jay Coleman and Richard Van Ingram

Illustrations: Paul Carrick and Tim Gerstmar

Cover: Paul Carrick

Giant Psychic Insects From Outer Space — that's the second-best title for a role-playing supplement I've ever heard. (First-best: *Bat-Winged Bimbos From Hell*, for the underappreciated *Macho Women with Guns** game.) But before you start swatting psychic insects, first you have to learn a new set of rules — which isn't as daunting as it seems. For **Don't Look Back** is not only pretty good, it's also pretty easy.

And pretty funny. Remember the *Chill** and *Teenagers From Outer Space** games? Put 'em together, and you've got the general idea. The modern world has become a repository for every whacked-out faction of the paranormal that ever graced the pages of a supermarket tabloid. Flying saucers roam the skyways. Vampires stalk the streets. Mad scientists use innocent citizens for depraved experiments funded by the U.S. government. And though Elvis hasn't shown up yet, it's just a matter of time.

The only folks standing between civilization and anarchy are, of course, the PCs. For the most part, they're ordinary humans: College Students, Private Eyes,

and — my favorite — Slackers (who “take great pride in their ability to do nothing for months, even years, at a time”). Designing a character couldn’t be simpler. Each player chooses his favorite archetype, then assigns ratings from -4 to +4 to Fitness, Intelligence, Perception, and four other Basic Abilities. A character also begins with several Acquired Abilities, depending on his archetype; College Students receive Biology and Computer Abilities, Private Eyes receive Stealth and Surveillance. Additionally, a player receives a fixed number of points he can spend on additional abilities or to improve abilities his PC already has. Finally, the player can invest in Advantages (Photographic Memory, Ambidexterity) by spending “positive” points, and Disadvantages (Gullible, Tragically Hip) by spending “negative” points. He acquires as many of these as he likes, as long as the total expenditure equals zero. Advanced players can experiment with supernatural Advantages (Heat Vision, Mental Shield) and Disadvantages (Grotesque Appearance, Weakness to Sunlight). Despite some balance problems — a Hidden Past, for instance, is considered more of a handicap than a Missing Limb — the rules generate versatile, appealing PCs. They’re not particularly durable, but that’s okay. Like goldfish, they tend to die off before you become attached to them. And it’s a snap to find replacements.

The resolution system relies exclusively on six-sided dice and requires five steps:

1. The gamemaster decides which of the character’s abilities is relevant to the attempted action, then notes the ability rating.
2. The gamemaster determines a Difficulty Factor, anywhere from -5 to +5.
3. The ability score is added to the Difficulty Factor, along with any modifiers for Advantages, Disadvantages, and equipment. The total — which we’ll call the Base Total — equals the number of dice to be rolled.
4. The player rolls the dice. If the Base Total was positive, he selects the three highest dice. If the Base Total was negative, he selects the three lowest dice.
5. The gamemaster compares the three-dice total to the Quality Table, which gives a resolution ranging from Horrible Failure to Incredible Success.

Convoluted? Sort of. But since all actions are resolved in the same way, the system becomes second nature

faster than you’d think. And for the most part, the results make sense. But be forewarned: it takes a seasoned gamemaster to adjudicate the Quality Table. What does it mean, say, when you get an Incredibly Successful Perception roll? You’ll have to figure that out yourself.

Combat employs a similar system, but it goes overboard on formulas, making it kind of a pain. For example, to calculate the amount of damage from a weapon, you determine the action’s Quality Rating, locate the relevant factor from the Damage Scale, multiply them together, round the result down, multiply this result by the relevant Defense Scale factor, round the new result down, then apply the damage. Though it generates acceptable results, a less math-heavy system would’ve been a better fit with a game this goofy.

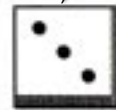
Which brings us, finally, to **Giant Psychic Insects**, one of the nuttiest and most entertaining SF adventures I’ve ever played. Seven-foot praying mantises from another planet are using the citizens of Erie, Pennsylvania as lab animals. It may be an isolated crisis or — gulp — the prelude to a full-scale alien invasion. And talk about an opening: the PCs awaken in a spaceship, strapped to operating tables, with the praying mantises preparing to turn their skulls into pin cushions. The action never lets up, nor does the flood of engaging nonsense: telepaths with a mental range of 10,000 miles, microscopic robots that eat electricity, even a reference to Frank Zappa (by way of Suzy Creamcheese). Laughs abound, typified by the organization of renegade scientists called the New England Research and Development Company — that’s NERDCo to you. True, chunks of **Psychic Insects** could’ve used more development; many important locations receive no more than a few sentences of skimpy description. And true, the climax could’ve been stronger; instead of the routine horror film finale, this would have been a good place for a surprise. Elvis, maybe?

Evaluation: **Don’t Look Back** may not be a groundbreaker, but it’s fast-paced, clever, and loaded with goodies. The Encounters Chapter details enough cybernetic assassins and brain-sucking aliens to support a year’s worth of scenarios. The gamemaster section is so complete, it even tells you how to ensure the comfort of your players (“access to refreshments and rest rooms is essential”). If you own the first edition of **Don’t Look Back** you can skip the

second and go straight to **Giant Psychic Insects**, which includes a summary of the changes in edition number two (there aren’t many). As for **Insects** itself, I haven’t had so much fun since MTV’s last *Beavis and Butt-head* Moron-a-thon — consider that a hint of what you’re in for.

(Information: Mind Ventures Games, PO Box 1032, Starkville, MS 39759.)

Star Wars Customizable Card* game



Starter deck: 60 cards, rules booklet

Booster pack: 15 cards

Decipher, Inc. \$9.50 (starter)
\$3 (booster)

Design: Tom Braunlich, Rollie Tesh, Ross Campbell, Dan Burns, and Richard Borg



Alternate Universe

*Star Trek: The Next Generation Customizable Card Game** expansion

Booster pack: 15 cards

Decipher, Inc.

Design: uncredited \$3

Yeah, I know the *Star Trek* card game has its problems. Yeah, I know it’s tough putting together a usable deck without investing a fortune. And yeah, I know that finding an *Enterprise* card is about as likely as finding a diamond in a box of Cracker Jacks. But I like it anyway. I like the streamlined rules, the nifty missions,

the clever way it simulates all the elements of a good SF adventure (see *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #218 for more). So naturally, I had high hopes for the **Star Wars** card game (no connection, by the way, to the *Star Wars* role-playing game). And why not? Same company. Same genre. Same designers.

It even looks the same. In fact, the best thing about **Star Wars** is the first-rate presentation, making it one of the few card games worth buying just for the graphics. The cards boast clutter-free layouts, engaging text, and vivid colors. The crisp photographs cover every memorable image from the films, no matter how obscure. I, for one, could've lived without a close-up of the dice hanging in the cockpit of the *Millennium Falcon*. Nor did I need individual cards depicting the backs — that's right, the backs — of Obi, Leia, and the Jawas. And in the tradition of the *Star Trek* card game, the main characters are conspicuously absent; you can open boosters till your fingers go numb without finding a single Han Solo or Chewbacca. Still, I had a blast savoring my favorite scenes and characters, especially the great cantina aliens like the hammer-headed Momaw Nadon.

If only **Star Wars** played as good as it looked. But alas, its merely okay. Each player begins with a 30-card deck — the Light Side player using gray cards, the Dark Side using black — which represents his total Life Force. Location cards are arranged in a row, representing, in essence, the game board. Players attempt to control Locations by deploying Character cards; if you wipe out all enemy personnel from a contested Location, the Location is yours. Controlled Locations generate Force points; the more Force points you generate, the more cards you can bring into play. Force points are expended to initiate battles, necessary to clear out enemy Locations. When a battle is declared, the combatants activate their Equipment cards and fire their Weapon cards. Each player draws the top card from his deck, then checks the upper corner for the Destiny Number. The Destiny Number — equivalent to a random die-roll — is added to the combatants' Power Values along with other pertinent modifiers. Destroyed cards are discarded. Additionally, each player suffers an attrition loss, sacrificing a number of cards equal in value to his opponents' Destiny draw. After the battle ends, players move their characters with Vehicle cards (Land-

speeder, Lift Tube), tinker with Device cards (Vaporator, Tatooine Utility Belt), and play Interrupt cards (Radar Scanner, Hyper Escape) to screw up the opposition. The first player to deplete the enemy's Force — which occurs when the enemy has no cards left in his deck — wins the game.

Granted, it's as action-packed as a demolition derby. But it's also a bit clunky. The Force rules, for example, involve a rather convoluted "flow" cycle, where cards begin in a Force Pile, then move to a Used Pile, then to a Reserve Deck, then back to the Force Pile. The attrition rules seem arbitrary and unnecessarily harsh. A typical game loses steam toward the end, when the outcome becomes all but inevitable. And though it's possible for two to play with the 60 cards in a single starter deck, I wouldn't count on having much fun. You'll need a much larger pool — I'd guess at least 100 Dark Side cards and 100 Light Siders — to make **Star Wars** come alive.

Much better is **Alternate Universe**, a 122-card *Star Trek* expansion that introduces a new category of cards called Doorways. When a Doorway is played, it opens the *Star Trek* universe to all sorts of alternate realities, parallel timelines, and illusory experiences. In game terms, it allows players to deploy specially marked **Alternate Universe (AU)** cards, such as Royale Casino (opponents play a game of blackjack, using Cunning numbers) and Samuel Clemens' Pocket Watch (an action scheduled to occur in the next turn occurs instead in the current turn). Trouble is, Doorway cards seem to be few and far between; I found them in only three of eight of my booster packs. Rather than fuss with the Doorways, we threw them out and used an alarm clock. (We set the clock to go off in a random number of minutes. **AU** cards could be played until the alarm rang.) But even without the Doorways — for that matter, even without the **AU** cards — the boosters contain enough bizarre Standard Universe cards to justify their purchase. How bizarre, you ask? How about the Humuhumunukunukuapua'a, an exotic fish that modifies Cunning and Strength? Or Mot's Advice, which bestows the skill of Barbering?

Evaluation: **Star Wars** has a lot going for it. The interplay between Locations and Vehicles imparts an appealing sense of movement. The imaginative flourishes — the Steal option, which allows players to move cards from the Light Side to the

Dark Side, and vice versa; the Utinni Effect, which compels characters to relocate to specific sites — make it a challenge to master. And the artwork ought to attract collectors like bloodmobiles attract vampires. If it'd hit the stores a few years ago, we'd have been doing handsprings. In today's deck-drenched market, however, it's just another card game, eminently playable but nothing to squander the rent money on. *Star Trek*, on the other hand, remains a delight. **Alternate Universe** doesn't do much to expand the rules, but it serves as a good excuse to revisit a terrific product.

(Information: Decipher, Inc., PO Box 56, Norfolk, VA 23501.)

Short and sweet

While we're on a roll, let's look at some more SF.

Star Fleet Battles* game (**Captain's Edition Basic Set**), by Stephen V. Cole with a cast of thousands. Task Force Games, \$30. **Battleships Module R5**, by Stephen V. Cole. Task Force Games, \$19. **Captain's Log 16**, edited by Stephen V. Cole. Task Force Games, \$15.

As far as I'm concerned, you can't call yourself a science-fiction gamer unless you're familiar with the Big Three: the *Star Wars* role-playing game, *Traveller*, and **Star Fleet Battles**. Now in its fourth edition and 17th (!) year, **Star Fleet Battles** stands as the definitive starship combat simulation, a board game so intricate, so all-consuming that you could spend another 17 years just getting to know it. Though not officially a part of the *Star Trek* universe — this despite the presence of the Federation, Klingons, and Romulans — **SFB** does a remarkable job of turning guys like you and me into guys like James T. Kirk and Jean-Luc Picard. The 256-page Basic Set rulebook covers a plethora of options, from photon torpedoes and cloaking devices to ballistic targeting and shuttlecraft evacuations. The generous selection of goodies — a huge hex map, 216 counters, a thick packet of player aids — allows you to stage a mind-boggling array of interstellar dogfights and star-base assaults, with a few space monsters thrown in for good measure. Emphasizing resource allocation and long-range planning, **SFB** requires tactical insight and a knack for bluffing — it's like playing three games of chess and a hand of poker at the same time. A game this complex is not for the faint of heart. But if you do your homework and hang in there, you'll find **Star Fleet Battles** to

be an experience without parallel, one that can easily become an obsession..

Over its lengthy existence, **Star Fleet Battles** has generated a shelf-full of supplements. Where do you start if you're a novice? Try **Module 5 Starships**, Task Force's biggest seller, which features background notes and statistics for such formidable battlecruisers as the Klingon B11 and the Romulan King Condor. A sheet of 108 counters, a 64-page display sheet booklet, and 15 scenarios complete the package. After that, take a look at the **Captain's Log**, a long-running publication that's half magazine, half expansion set. Issue 16 includes nine intriguing scenarios, a discussion of emergency deceleration, and tips for putting together your own SFB newsletter. Master **Module 5** and study a couple of **Captain's Logs**, and you'll be an expert before you know it.

(Information: Task Force Games, PO Box 50145, Amarillo, TX 79159-0145.)

Galaxy Guide 2: Yavin and Bespin, by Jonatha Caspian, Christopher Kubasik, Bill Slavicsek, and C.J. Tramontana. West End Games, \$15. **Galaxy Guide 12: Aliens**, by C. Robert Carey, Harry L. Heckel, Pablo Hidalgo, Jean Rabe, and Lisa Smedman, with Douglas S. Carey, Peter Schweighofer, and Trevor. J. Wilson. West End Games, \$15.

So you're a fan of the Star Wars RPG who's not up to the rigors of the *DarkStryder Campaign*? Then consider these outstanding entries from West End's popular *Galaxy Guide* series. **Yavin and Bespin**, revised for Second Edition *Star Wars*, details two classic settings from the movies. The Yavin system, featured in *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*, includes the tropical moon that served as a Rebel Alliance base. The planet Bespin, introduced in *Star Wars V: The Empire Strikes Back*, is home to Cloud City,

where Han Solo reunited with Lando Calrissian. Packed with blueprints, anecdotes, and campaign ideas, the books a banquet for gamemasters and players alike.

Aliens, also compatible with the second edition, catalogs more than 30 extraterrestrial species, complete with ecology notes, cultural analyses, and personality profiles. Forgoing the usual military and scientific types, it focuses instead on the galaxy's oddballs and misfits. Thus, we have the primitive Amanin (who roll along the ground like beach balls), the three-headed Cha'wen'he (nervous, indecisive chatterboxes), and the belligerent Noehons (gun-toting grasshoppers). It's a great read and a good resource, though it could've been better if they hadn't — ahem — left out the adventure hooks.

Webs Basic System game*, by Keith Bailey. Web Games, \$15. **Web of Stars**, by Keith Bailey. Web Games, \$26.

This ambitious RPG, a universal system stressing broad generalities over setting-specific details, resembles a stripped-down GURPS* game. The **Basic System** rulebook presents the fundamentals in clear prose. Players pick races for their PCs, randomly determine the Prime Attributes (Strength, Agility, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charm, Constitution, and, oddly, Voice), then calculate a bunch of Secondary Attributes (like Perception and Endurance) based on the Prime ratings. A variable number of Buy Points are used to purchase skills, advantages, and spells. Though derivative — in addition to GURPS, I detect bits of the AD&D® game (Armor Classes) and the Call of Cthulhu* game (percentile dice for skill resolution) — its a credible introduction to a promising series. **Web of Stars**, world book number one, is set in the 22nd Century, a brutal future where hordes of ruthless cor-

porations compete for interstellar riches. Adding to the mix are a mysterious alien race known as the T'sali and a group space-traveling spell-casters called Technomancers. The skimpy scenario, all of three pages long, doesn't give the game much of a workout. But I had a ball with the chapter on planet creation, which explains how to create your own solar system, right down to the last biozone and axial tilt.

(Information: Web Games, 240 Spicewood Lane, Hendersonville, NC 28791-1343.)

BattleTech Record Sheets: 3055 & 3058. FASA Corporation, \$18.

This massive collection of record sheets for the Battletech* game covers all of the robotic monstrosities from *Technical Readout: 3055* and *Technical Readout: 3058*. If you pair off the 'Mechs in every possible combination, you can stage — let me get my calculator — 21,740 different battles. Throw in all the tanks, hovercrafts, and VTOLs, also included here, and the total increases to... well, it increases a whole lot. Hey, this may be the best value in the history of the hobby!



Rick Swan, the author of *The Complete Guide to Role-Playing Games* (St. Martin's Press), has designed and edited nearly 50 role-playing products. He is dying to know the title of the episode of the *Lost in Space* TV show about the talking vegetables. You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you'd like a reply.

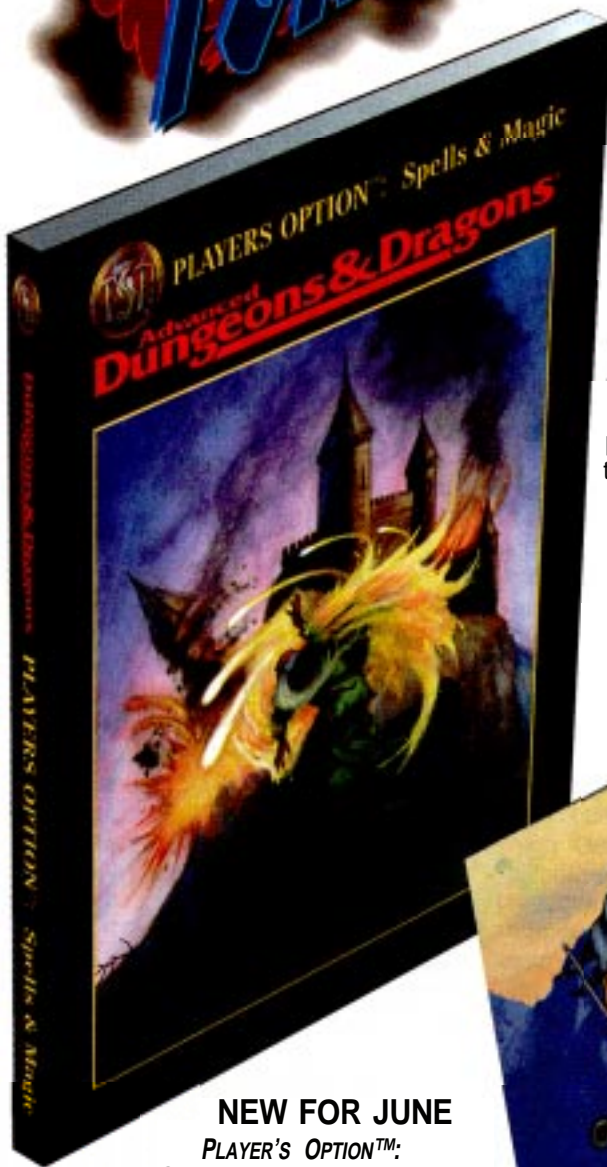
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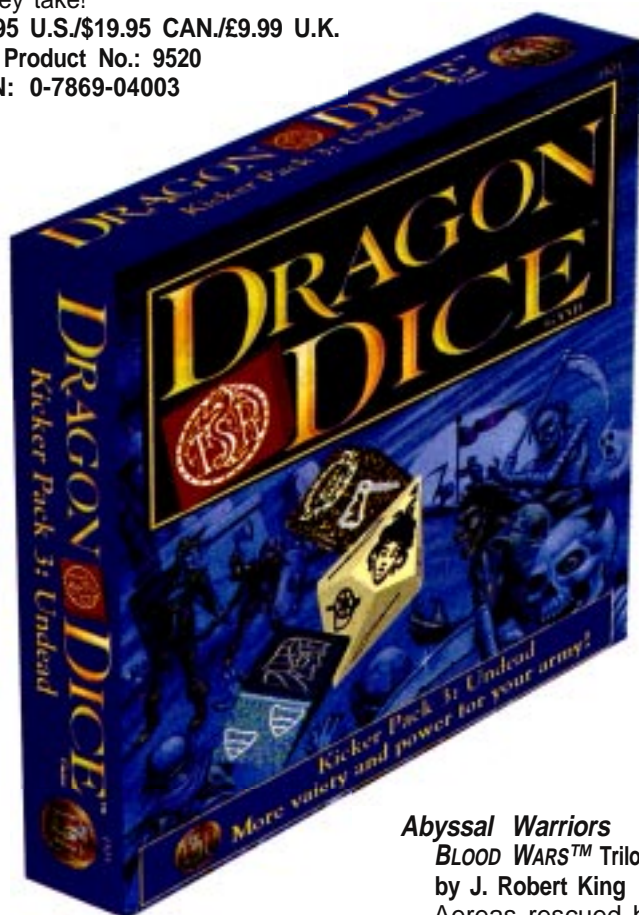


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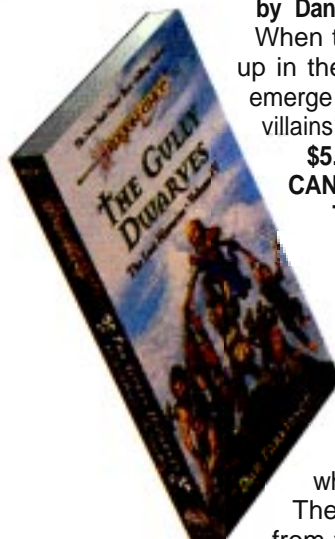
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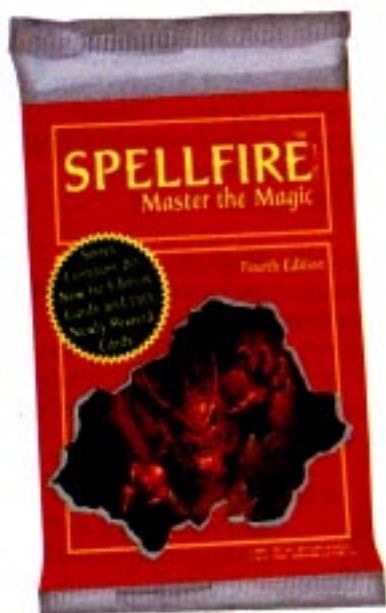
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Trivia Questions:

In the land of Cerilia, the setting of the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign, which of the dreadful *awnsheghlien* wields the sword known as *Knighstopper*?

In the SAVAGE COAST™ campaign, what are the opposite of Panache Points?

What is the last wizard spell described in the spell appendix to the Player's Handbook?

Answer: The dragon, Ghaele, which

positions at the company. At its huge headquarters, said to have over 600 square feet of space per employee, Wizards of the Coast (WotC) recently opened a tournament center and game club. At the April 13 opening the company held one of 45 qualifying tournaments for WotC's *Magic** game Pro Tour circuit, six professional tournaments with prizes totalling over a million dollars. (Contact: question@wizards.com)

On the same subject, the publisher of the trading-card game magazine *Scrye* is starting a companion magazine, *Mastyr*, devoted to professional play of the Magic game and other trading card games. (Contact: mastyrmag@aol.com)

The Duelist, WotC's magazine devoted to the *Magic* game, plans to go monthly in June. *The Duelist* recently got a new art director and, at this writing, is seeking to replace outgoing editor Kathryn Haines. Haines, who has edited the magazine since its inception in February

1994, entered the job straight out of Yale, where she took a degree in Literature.

TSR's Barbara Young, longtime editor of *DUNGEON® Adventures* and managing editor of TSR Books for the last year, has left the company to study aikido in Japan. "Think of it as a strange sort of mid-life crisis," she says. She plans to stay at least six months; her visa lasts a year. Barb has studied aikido for six years and is preparing for her black belt test.

1995 Origins Award role-playing nominees

Best Role-playing Rules: *Changeling**: *The Dreaming* (White Wolf); *Cyber-generation** (R. Talsorian); *Everway** (Wizards of the Coast); *Mage**: *The Ascension** 2nd Edition (White Wolf); *Species** (West End Games)

Best Adventure: *Beyond the Wall*, for *Pendragon** (Chaosium); *Blades*, for *Earthdawn** (FASA); *Coming Full Circle*, for

*Call of Cthulhu** (Pagan Publishing); *Giovanni Chronicle: The last Supper*, for *Vampire** (White Wolf); *Strange Aeons*, for *Call of Cthulhu* (Chaosium)

Best Supplement: *Aztlan*, for *Shadowrun* (FASA); *BIRTHRIGHT®*, for the AD&D game (TSR); *Faeries*, for *Ars Magica** (Wizards of the Coast); *GURPS Cthulhupunk*, for *GURPS** and (sort of) *Call of Cthulhu* (Steve Jackson Games); *Houses of Hermes*, for *Ars Magica* (Wizards of the Coast)



Allen Varney's credits include three board games, 15 role-playing supplements, and four pick-a-path children's books. His *Horizon: Stronghold of Hope*, a *MAGE** game supplement (written with Beth Fischl), appears in June. Send your news to tsrdragon@aol.com.

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Interplay finds Utter East

Interplay Productions (Irvine, CA) is setting its first licensed AD&D® computer game, *BLOOD & MAGIC™*, in a "previously unexplored area" of the Forgotten Realms called the Utter East.

Nestled between Ulgarth and Zakhara, the Utter East brings new magics to the Realms. According to a press release, "The greatest of these are the Blood Forges, mighty artifacts that conquer entire armies."

Developed by Tachyon Studios (Oakhurst, CA), *BLOOD & MAGIC* is the first real-time strategy game set in the Realms. It debuts this summer for both the PC and Macintosh. Curiously, the game includes exclusive *DRAGON MASTER®* dice for TSR's *DRAGON DICE™* game, though *BLOOD & MAGIC* has nothing to do with either the tabletop dice game or Interplay's upcoming computer version. (Web: www.interplay.com)

FASA/Playmates decision

In April of 1993, FASA Corporation (Chicago) and a spinoff company, Virtual World Entertainment, sued Playmates Toys Inc. (La Mirada, CA) for copyright and "trade dress" infringement, interference, and unfair competition after Playmates' introduction of the *ExoSquad* toy line prompted a FASA licensee to put the development of a *Battletech* toy line on hold. (Earlier, Playmates had considered and rejected a *Battletech* license.) On January 22, 1996, in a 109-page opinion, Reuben Castillo, US District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois, ruled in Playmates' favor on all eight claims that had not already been dismissed on summary judgement.

FASA started circa 1981 as the Freedomian Air & Space Administration, named for the fictitious country in the Marx Brothers movie "Duck Soup." FASA's first releases were ship plans for the *Traveller®* RPG, then a licensed *Star*

Trek game designed by the now-defunct Fantasimulations design studio. In 1984 FASA released the *Battledroids®* board game, quickly retitled after a protest from Lucasfilm, which claims rights to the term "droid" (introduced in the *Star Wars* films). The game became a major hit, spawning role-playing and computer versions and even virtual-reality arcade installations.

In other FASA news, the company is promoting three related supplements to the *Shadowrun®* game that concern the presidential election of 2057. In theory, players can fill out ballots and elect the candidate of their choice. But because of the long lead times that supplements require, FASA has in fact already decided the election's winner. No, they're not telling. (Contact: fasamike@aol.com)

New licenses

This fall Chameleon Eclectic (Blacksburg, VA), publisher of the *Millennium's End®* and *Psychosis®* RPGs, releases *The Babylon Project®* game, an RPG based on the Warner science-fiction TV series *Babylon 5*. Set in the years before and during the first season, the game is being designed by the startup company that holds the license, WireFrame Productions. A press release says, "Players take the roles of humans or aliens in the tense period following the Earth-Minbari war leading up to the emergence of the Shadows and the Narn-Centauri war." Series creator J. Michael Straczynski will have creative approval of the game and support line, which includes *The Earthforce Sourcebook* in late fall and an *Earth Colonies Sourcebook* and *Game Resource Kit* by year's end. (Contact: cee@bev.net; Web: skynet.bevc.blacksburg.va.us/cee/)

Steve Jackson Games (Austin, TX) has acquired gaming rights to the popular "Discworld" series of funny-fantasy novels by British writer Terry Pratchett. The game book, a supplement for SJG's

Generic Universal RolePlaying System, will be co-written by Pratchett and John M. Ford, himself a noted science-fiction and fantasy writer (*The Dragon Waiting*, *Growing Up Weightless*), humorist, and avid gamer. Look for *GURPS Discworld* next year. (Contact: sjgames@io.com; Web: io.com/sjgames/)

In July SJC releases the *Nightmare Chess®* game, a licensed edition of the decade-old French game *Tempete sur l'Exchequier* (Storm on the Chessboard). It's a set of 80 cards, to be used with a traditional chess game, that affect the rules of chess in different ways. One card might make your knight move like a bishop for one turn; another builds a permanent wall to stop enemy pieces, and so on. (Wizards of the Coast had planned a similar game, but don't hold your breath waiting.)

Gold Rush Games (Elk Grove, CA) has put out one product (a licensed *Champions®* game adventure) and a blizzard of press releases. GRG has bought rights to Fantasy Games Unlimited's old *Bushido®* RPG and plans a new edition — GRG expanded its license from Hero Games to do supplements and sourcebooks for the *Hero System®* game line (see last issue) — GRG delays the new *Bushido®* game edition — GRG is doing a licensed RPG based on the excellent American comic-book series *Usagi Yojimbo*, about a samurai rabbit in a feudal funny-animal Japan. Will we see the game by this year's GEN CON® Game Fair in August? Maybe if GRG can find time in its busy press-release schedule. . . . (Contact: goldrushg@aol.com)

Notes from the field

Wizards of the Coast (Seattle, WA) has put on indefinite hold the long-planned role-playing game based on its *Magic: The Gathering®* trading card game. The design team (Wolfgang Baur, Teeuwynn Woodruff, Mike Selinker) may find other

Continued on page 119

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons[®]

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